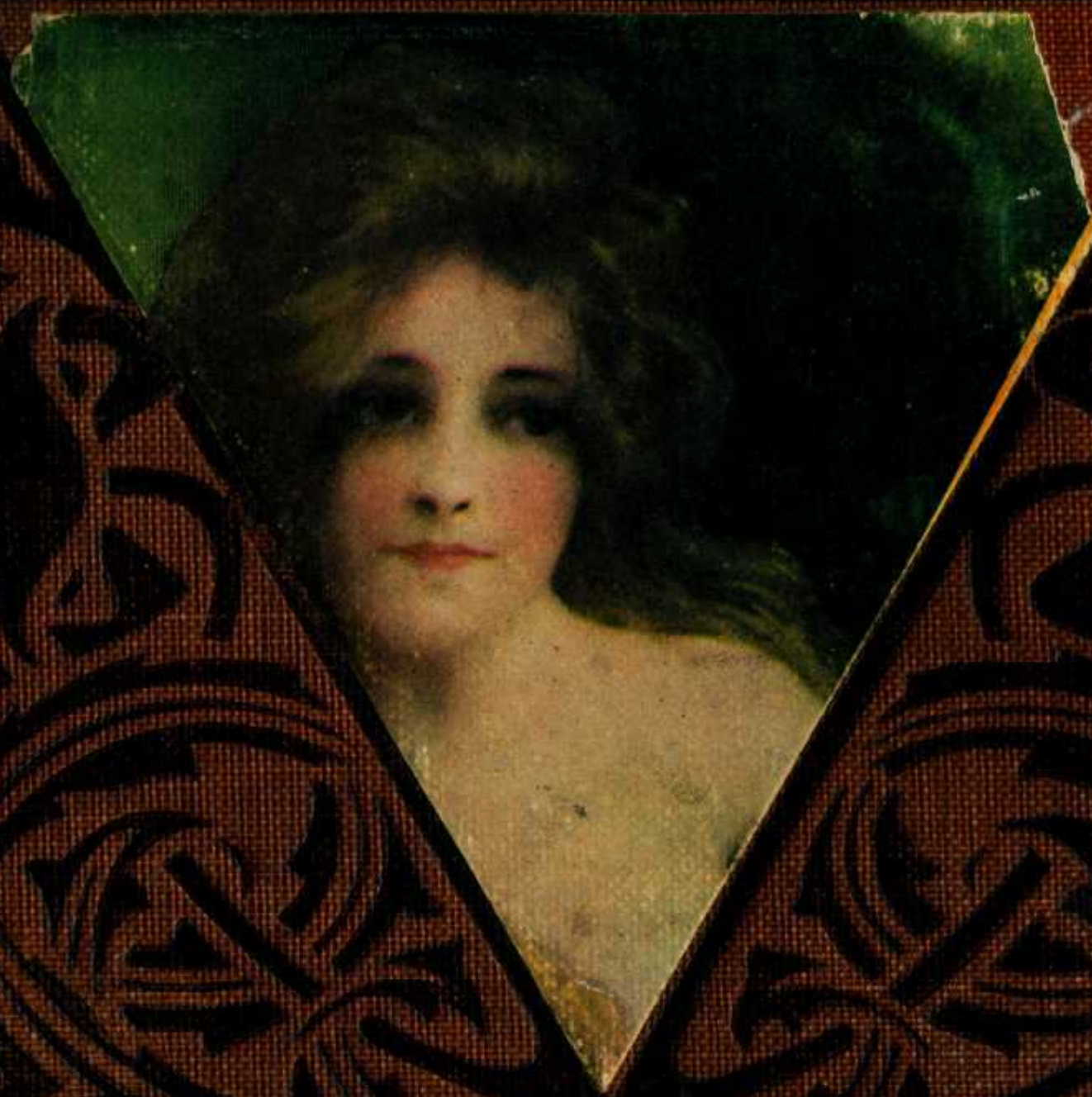

HOW HE WON HER

MRS. SOUTHWORTH

Anna S. Rake

HOW HE WON HER

A NOVEL

BY

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HOW HE WON HER.

CHAPTER I.

AN AWFUL HISTORY.

Justin Rosenthal sat alone with his sister Erminie in the drawing-room of the parsonage and told a wonderful story of voyage and shipwreck, of preservation and residence on a desert island, of rescue and return home.

Erminie listened with breathless interest to his narrative, and, when it was finished, she earnestly thanked Heaven for his restoration to his home and friends.

And then, in return, she gave him the history of all that had occurred to her since he had first sailed.

She told him of those gathering clouds of disaffection in the South that no one could be made to believe would ever break in a Civil War. She spoke of that solemn day in the Senate when the Southern Senators withdrew. She whispered of the shameful, sorrowful day when Fort Sumter was taken, and, in the language of the man who commanded the assault, "The proud flag that had never been humbled before—the star-spangled banner—was humbled to the dust." She told how these words had burned in the hearts of all true patriots until they lighted a flame of love of country, hate of traitors, never to be quenched; how, at the President's call for seventy-five thousand men, four times that number started to arms; how, even across the broad Atlantic, in Ireland, the warm-hearted lovers of the Union had banded together and offered their services to the Federal Government through our Ministers and Consuls abroad; how these had been declined, as unneeded then.

Here the Lutheran minister's orphan child paused to gather strength, for she had next to speak of the fatal fields of Bethel and Ball's Bluff, and of Bull Run, where her brave father fell. She told the awful history amid sobs and tears that she could not restrain.

"He died where he fell, before his men, in front of the enemy. He lies buried near the spot, his grave marked by the care of a brother officer, his honored remains waiting only the return of peace to be removed."

"They shall not await the return of peace; they shall be brought home immediately," answered Justin.

Then Erminie spoke of opening her father's will, and seeing there that he had left his property to his two children, to be divided between them, share and share alike.

"Then my dear father did not believe me to be lost?" said Justin.

"Then we none of us did; there had not been time enough for us to grow anxious. We had got two letters from you, one mailed from Porto Praya, and one from the Cape of Good Hope. When my dear father died we were looking daily for a letter from you from Calcutta."

"I am glad that he suffered no anxiety on my account. Go on, sweet sister."

"Oh, my brother! after that public and private woes came thick and fast. Defeat after defeat discouraged our army, until, at length, came the crushing shame and sorrow of the last battle of Manassas. Blow upon blow fell upon my own heart, until I thought that the Lord had forgotten to take care of me. I was still weeping, weeping day and night over the death of my dear father, when there came news of the wreck of the *Sultana*. It came through the officers of that Dutch merchantman who picked up the lifeboat with the missionary party on board; and it came in the form of a narrative written by the Rev. Mr. Ely. It was published in all the papers. It contained a list of the names of those whose lives were lost, and, Justin, your name was among them!"

"Poor sister!"

"I laid down to die. I did so wish for death! But I suppose youth and life were too strong within me, and I lived and suffered. Ah, Justin! I was a self-occupied

woman up to that time. I thought 'no sorrow was like unto my sorrow.' In the midst of that great bitterness of grief I received a telegram from New York, calling me to the deathbed of our dear Uncle Friedrich."

"Yes, I know."

"I went on immediately and remained with him until he died. Ah, Justin! the scene of that good man's peaceful departure went far to heal my spirit. He talked to me when he was able; his words were few, but very precious. He told me, in this great crisis of the country's history, when, for the high and holy cause of union and liberty, hundreds were suffering more than I, and thousands quite as much, I must not sit down in selfish sorrow, I must get up and minister to those whose sorrows were as great as mine, and whose necessities were so much greater."

"He was right, Erminie."

"I know it, and I knew it then. He told me to go among the wounded soldiers in the numerous hospitals, and, with hand and purse, minister to them and relieve their wants. He told me to seek out the bereaved widows, and orphans, and mothers of those who had fallen in the holy war; and to serve all as far as they should have need and I have power; but especially—oh! especially—to minister to the mourning mothers. 'Widows,' he said, 'may be consoled by second husbands; orphans grow up and forget their fathers; but the mother whose boy has fallen in battle is inconsolable and unforgetting forever. Therefore, especially, motherless girl, comfort the childless mothers! And, kneeling by his bed, I promised to obey his words. And that same day, as the sun went down, he died. But it was not until some days had passed that I knew he had left me all his wealth. Justin, I came home, and I have religiously obeyed his dying instructions, and—in comforting others I have found comfort."

"As all mourners may, if they will, my sweet sister," replied her brother. He fell into deep thought for a few minutes, and then, looking earnestly at his sister, he said:

"But, Erminie, in all this long story you have never once mentioned the name of Colonel Eastworth. Where is he? What is he doing? Why are you not married?"

Erminie grew even paler than she had before been; she compressed her lips until they, too, faded, and then slowly and steadily answered:

"'Where is he?' In South Carolina. 'What is he doing?' Warring upon his native land. 'Why are we not married?' Because the child of Ernest Rosenthal can never be the wife of a man in arms against his country. Never mention his name to me again, Justin. For he was the very caitiff who so gloried in his shame as to boast that he had humbled the proud flag that had never been humbled before!"

And the beautiful eyes of this "falcon-hearted dove" flashed as she spoke.

Justin put out his arms and drew her to his breast; for he saw that those flashing eyes were about to be drowned in tears.

"My dear sister! my dear, dear sister, blow upon blow has indeed fallen fast upon your heart. How much you have suffered!" he said, as he tenderly soothed her.

She wept upon his bosom for a little while, and then lifting her head and wiping her eyes, she smiled and said:

"But I have been comforted, Justin. In comforting others I have been comforted. And now I am more than comforted—I am rejoiced. Now all is changed, in public and in private, from grief to joy. And, oh! how suddenly changed, brother! In a day! Almost in an hour! Yesterday morning came the glorious news of the victory of Gettysburg, and I knew that the tide of war had turned. Soon after—very soon after—came a messenger of joy to me. The minister that brought me the news of your safe return from—the grave! It was like a miraculous resurrection. Coming directly upon the news of the great victory, it was almost overwhelming. There seemed too much joy for one day!"

"I entreated Dr. Sales to break the matter to you very cautiously," said Justin.

"Ah! do you think that could be broken to me cautiously?" inquired Erminie, with a smile. "Why, Justin, as soon as he came into the room and I saw his face, I knew that he brought me 'glad tidings.' I naturally thought it was of the victory of Gettysburg, so I told him I had heard of it that very morning. But when he drew

your name into the conversation, I knew in an instant that you were saved. Oh, Justin, it was such a shock of joy! But it did not kill me as it might have done."

"Yes, it might, my sweet sister, for you look very pale and thin and fragile—not well able to bear a shock of any sort," said Justin, tenderly.

"Ah, but all is well now. I am happy, so happy, although I weep. You must not mind my weeping, dear. We women often weep most when we are happiest, and —ah, yes, Heaven knows, smile most when we are most wretched!"

"'Smile most when you are most wretched!' Where have you learned that bitter lesson, my sister?" Justin gravely questioned.

"In the hospital, where I have seen the heart-broken mother smiling on her mutilated or dying boy to keep his spirits up as long as he should live."

"You seem to be very familiar with the wards of the hospitals, my sister."

"It is the business, the blessing of my life to be so. But, Justin, dear, I wish to ask you about Britomarte. You took care of her on the desert island. She saved your life in the sea fight. Ah, how my heart thrilled to the touch of that story. Now you are betrothed, I hope, and soon to marry? Oh, Justin, how cordially I would welcome her here as my sister, and how willingly resign my position as mistress of the house, in her favor. For the house is yours, you know, Justin, and as your wife it would be her right."

Justin slowly shook his head, compressed his lips, and frowned.

"What do you mean by that, my brother?"

"There is no possibility of a marriage between Miss Conyers and myself," he said.

"Justin!"

"You know what were Britomarte's sentiments on the subject of marriage, or rather of the position of a woman in marriage. And now I have only to add that all which has happened to us has not been able to work a change in them."

"Oh, Justin! I am so sorry!"

"So you see, my dear, there is no chance of your being

superseded on the household throne, for since Britomarte will not be my wife, no other woman shall."

"Oh, Justin, what a pity. But if she will not be your wife, she shall be your sister and mine. She shall come here, and share my home and means."

"She would never do that; she is much too proud to be dependent, even on those who love and honor her most."

"Then what will become of her? for oh, Justin, it is whispered that—that——"

"What?" inquired the young man, seeing his sister grow pale and large-eyed as she paused.

"That—oh, it is too horrible to breathe—that——"

"For Heaven's sake, speak, Erminie!"

"The house is the resort of conspirators, who plan—plan—no less a crime than—than——" Her voice gradually sank to a whisper, and then stopped altogether.

"Than what? Speak, my sister; take courage and speak!"

"Oh, I cannot! I cannot! Spare me! it is too horrible!"

"But what house is it to which you allude?"

"Witch Elms."

"And it is said to be the resort of conspirators, who plan—what?" persisted Justin.

"I cannot say it. I hope it is all a mere canard. Certainly the civil and the military authorities have both visited and ransacked the house, but they have discovered nothing there but what they call 'the fossil remains of an old lady and two negroes,' meaning Miss Pole, the centenarian aunt of Britomarte, and the two servants."

"Then the horrible story, whatever it may be, is probably a mere canard, not worth our attention."

"But Britomarte! She cannot go there, even if her old relative would receive her. What will become of her? What can we do for her?"

"We can do many things in this world, but we can do nothing with the will of a woman like Miss Conyers. We must leave her to the Lord and herself. And have you lived here quite alone all this time, my poor Erminie?" said Justin, pityingly.

"Oh, no. I should have told you before, only there was so much to tell and to hear. Elfrida Fielding is

with me. She is a refugee from Virginia. Her father is with General Meade at Gettysburg. We had a telegram from him yesterday. He is wounded, but not dangerously, and is coming home on leave."

"Then they are on the right side."

"Thank Heaven, yes! But they have suffered very much for their devotion to the Union; they have had their house burned over their heads by the Secessionists, and they escaped the flames only through the fidelity of an old family servant. They have been here ever since. At least this is Elfie's home always, and her father's whenever he comes to see her."

"That is right, my sister. Let the home of our heroic father be the refuge of all whom the war has made homeless and who seek its threshold. But where is my little friend now? I should be glad to see her."

"Immediately on receiving the telegram yesterday, she prepared to go to Gettysburg to bring her father home. I also was ready to go with her, when the visit of Mr. Sales with the joyful news of your return stopped my journey. And so Elfie, after kissing and congratulating, and laughing and weeping over me, and sending what she called 'lots of love' to you, left in the three o'clock train alone."

While the sister and brother conversed, the time, unheeded, passed away, and now it was nearly noon, when the door-bell rang.

"Oh, I hope that is Britomarte. Did she say she would come early?" inquired Erminie.

"She said she would come this morning—she did not specify the hour," answered Justin, rising to open the drawing-room door.

Britomarte it was, for Justin met her on the threshold, in the act of being ushered in by Uncle Bob, the old servant of Elfie, who also had found a home at the parsonage.

Justin warmly welcomed Miss Conyers, but was cut short in his demonstrations by Erminie, who flew to meet her friend, and fell weeping for joy on Britomarte's bosom.

"How pale you are, my darling. You have suffered

much since I saw you last," said Miss Conyers, tenderly caressing Erminie.

"Oh, much! much! How much you do not know or guess. But it is all over now, dear Britomarte, quite over, now that I see you and Justin safe, and all is well, now, very well, since the tide of war has turned, and the invaders are flying before our victorious army," she answered, smiling through her tears.

"And do you know what they are saying outside, my darling?" inquired Miss Conyers, brightly glancing back her smile.

"No, what?" eagerly demanded Erminie.

"Haven't you been out this morning, Justin?" inquired Miss Conyers, turning to Mr. Rosenthal.

"No—why?"

"Nor received a visitor?"

"No visitor except yourself."

"Then I have the happiness to be the first to announce the news to you. Vicksburg has capitulated!"

"Vicksburg capitulated!" echoed both Justin and Erminie, in a breath.

"The words are in everybody's mouth. The stars and stripes are waving from half the windows on the avenue."

"Oh, Justin, go! go out and learn the particulars, but don't stay long. I cannot bear you out of my sight long, lest I should wake up and find your return all a dream," urged Erminie.

And Britomarte and Erminie were left together for a long *téte-à-téte*. Erminie took Britomarte up into her own bed-chamber, and they sat down to talk. What need to relate their conversation? To do it would be to repeat all that is already known to the reader of what happened to each during their long separation. To Britomarte Erminie told the same story that she had told to Justin, and by her was comforted with the same tender sympathy she had received from him. And Britomarte answered all Erminie's questions concerning the voyage, the wreck, the rescue, the life on the desert island, the deliverance from the place, the cruise of the *Xyphias*, the sea fight, the capture of the privateer, and the voyage home.

CHAPTER II.

THE VETERAN'S RETURN.

While Erminie and Britomarte talked together there came a rush of feet upon the stairs, followed by the flinging open of the chamber door, and the sudden appearance of Elfie. She sprang at once toward Britomarte, threw herself upon her bosom, and hugged and kissed her, and laughed and cried over her.

"But, dear Elfie, how soon you have returned. In twenty-four hours. Why, you could scarcely have reached your journey's end. And how did you find your father? Doing well, I hope, from your joyous looks," said Erminie as soon as she could put in a word.

"Oh! yes, the old boy's all right! He's got his right arm in a sling, and a plaster on both cheeks, and a patch over his left eye—that's all. He's not fit for duty, but he needn't go to bed before a healthy Christian's usual hour of retiring," answered Elfie, as she recovered her breath, and threw herself into a chair.

"But how soon you have got back; I don't understand it," said Erminie, returning to the 'previous question.'

"Don't you? Well, neither do I. All I know is that I came very near passing my awful old responsibility on the road. When the train stopped at the Relay House—which you know used to be a comfortable hotel, but is now turned into something between military headquarters and a beer garden—I looked out of the window, and there, as sure as you live, stood my pap, with a lot of dilapidated heroes of the rank and file, on the platform. I had just time to jump off the car before the train started again."

"Oh, Elfie, dear, how rash to jump off the cars just as the train was about to start!" exclaimed Erminie.

"'Rash!' Well, I like that. How could it have been rash?"

"You might have been killed."

"But I wasn't, so it couldn't have been rash. If I had been hurt, then you might have called it rash; but as I

wasn't, you can only call it fearless. But I don't want to talk of myself, but of my ferocious old governor, who stood there on the platform, bloody, dusty, smoky, bound, bandaged and plastered, and looking, for all the world, like a disreputable old prize-fighter that had been considerably damaged in the ring."

"But you met him—oh, you met him as the daughter of a hero should meet her wounded father!" exclaimed Erminie with enthusiasm.

"Which means that I wept over the old boy, and set him to weeping, and made a melting scene among all those soldiers. Not much, I didn't. I took him by his whole arm, and turned him round and round until I had inspected him well, and then I said:

"'Oh, you miserable looking old pap. I don't believe you came from Gettysburg or any other gallant battlefield. I believe you are fresh from a fireman's free fight, or an election riot, where the pretensions of rival candidates are canvassed with cudgels. Where have you been, and what doing, to get yourself so dirty, and knocked into such an old cocked hat?'

"And my old governor laughed, and said that he had been in a dusty place; that it was very dusty at Gettysburg; and that shot and shell were flying thick and fast.

"And then I demanded to know how it happened that he should be loafing about the Relay House in such a disreputable way; and he told me that, feeling stiff and sore, and hungry and tired, he had got off at the Relay House with the intention of resting for the night before going on to Washington. And then the old fellow got sentimental, and called me his darling child and his brave girl; but I stopped all that by firing off at him the news of Britomarte's and Justin's resurrection from a 'watery grave' Girls, it did him more good than all the surgeon's plasters, and even the bath and dinner. He felt better immediately, and proposed that we should start for Washington by the evening train to welcome you back. But of course I wouldn't allow that. Instead of letting him go to Washington, I made him go to bed, and carried him a cup of tea, and read to him all the evening. It was the full account of the battle of Gettysburg in the morning paper."

"But, Elfie, dear, what have you done with your father now? Let me go to him; he must feel neglected."

"Oh, no, he don't. I took him at once to his bedroom and made him lie down and rest; and I asked Catherine to take him up a glass of wine and some biscuits. He's all right, and will join us at dinner. And now, with your good leave, I will go to my room and get a little of this dust and smoke out of my eyes and nose before presenting myself to the Rev. Justin Rosenthal," said Elfie, rising.

Erminie and Britomarte went downstairs to the drawing-room, where, in the course of an hour, they were joined by Elfie, who had renovated herself with a fresh toilet.

When the three friends were seated together, Britomarte said:

"Here are three of our school quartette; but where is the fourth? Where is Alberta Goldsborough?"

"Alberta Corsoni, you mean; for she has changed herself from a planter's daughter into a bandit's bride, or a guerrilla's bride, which amounts to the same thing," said Elfie.

"She made her escape from the convent, and eloped with Vittorio Corsoni, who married her the same night," said Erminie.

"Yes; and he was a good fellow enough until he married her. He had embraced the cause of the Union against the rebels. Some people said, however, that he did so only in opposition to old Mr. Goldsborough, who had opposed his union with Alberta. However that may be, he certainly was a Unionist before his marriage. But it seems that Alberta is one of the most determined female rebels that ever lived; and possessing immense influence over her love-sick young husband, she won him to the cause of rebellion; so that now he is one of the most formidable of those brigand leaders who ravage with fire and sword the shores of the Potomac and its tributaries," said Elfie.

"His Italian nature took readily to guerrilla warfare," sighed Erminie.

"And now he and my traitor are brother bandits, and the best friends in the world. When either has made a

successful raid, he divides the spoils with the other," laughed Elfie.

Just at that moment the bell rang, and the next instant the door opened and Justin entered the drawing-room, accompanied by Lieutenant Ethel.

Elfie sprang up to greet her old acquaintance, but dropped into her seat again on seeing a stranger.

Justin advanced and warmly shook hands with his little friend, and with Britomarte, and then he brought up Lieutenant Ethel and presented him to the party.

"I am very glad to see you, sir; and I have to thank you very earnestly for your great kindness to my brother and friends in their extremity," said Erminie.

The young officer bowed lowly before the beautiful, pale girl, who thus addressed him, and he replied:

"It will now be much greater pleasure to me than ever to remember that I was able to be of some slight service to your friends, Miss Rosenthal."

"I trust that you will give us some opportunity of proving our gratitude to you, Mr. Ethel. My brother informs me that your duties will detain you here in Washington for some days or weeks. I hope that you will gratify us by making our quiet house your home during the period of your stay," said Erminie.

"A thousand thanks, Miss Rosenthal! But my domestication in this lovely home would be much too great a tax upon your kindness, and very much too great a happiness for my merits," said the young officer.

"I assure you it would give us sincere pleasure to have you," said Erminie.

"Ethel shall stay just where he is, Erminie. Give yourself no further trouble to press him. I was his guest for many weeks, and he shall be mine for many days, at least. Oh, I haven't consulted him on the subject. I knew it would be useless. I ordered his man Martin to pack up his effects and bring them over here this afternoon. So, sister, you may have a room made ready for the lieutenant, and a hammock swung somewhere for the seaman—or lacking a hammock, an ordinary cot and mattress will do," said Justin.

"Oh, Rosenthal," began the young officer.

"Hold your tongue, Ethel! You're not on your quar-

terdeck now! I'm commander of this ship, and I mean to be obeyed!" exclaimed Justin.

"But you will allow me to say——"

"Not a syllable against dropping your anchor in this harbor."

"Well, I won't! I was only about to observe that I used to hear Judith threaten her 'gay Tom' to make him do as he liked! You are only making me do as I like," said the young lieutenant, with a bow to Erminie.

"And now let us talk about something else! Young ladies, this is a great holiday! To-night there is to be a brilliant illumination, in honor of the two great victories of Gettysburg and Vicksburg. I have ordered several pounds of wax candles, which, when they come, you will have cut into the proper lengths. I have also spoken to a carpenter to come and fix holders for the lights at the windows. You can send a servant with him through the rooms," said Justin.

CHAPTER III.

JUSTIN ENLISTS—ELFIE DRILLS.

Young Ethel remained the honored guest of the old parsonage. He had been relieved of the command of the *Sea Scourge* and promoted to the rank of first lieutenant, and he was now waiting orders.

Major Fielding also, while recovering from his wounds, made the parsonage his home.

But neither arguments nor entreaties could induce Miss Conyers to profit by the large-hearted hospitality of the Rosenthals and take up even a temporary residence under their roof. She found cheap board in a respectable prviate family, in the suburbs, near the parsonage, and she visited her friends very often and went every day with Erminie to the hospitals.

Justin, very soon after his return home, made known his intention of enlisting as a private soldier in the army.

And his sister saw no more of him for a week, at the end of which he reappeared at the parsonage with his fine auburn hair cropped close to his head and surmounted

by the soldier's cap, and his athletic form displayed to the very best advantage in the round blue jacket and trousers of the private's uniform.

The three young ladies were alone in the drawing-room when he was ushered in in this dress.

Half laughing and half crying, Erminie sprang to welcome him.

With visible emotion Britomarte also offered him her hand.

As Justin was obliged to be back at his camp before the hour of "tattoo," he could stay but a few minutes with his friends. He soon arose, took an affectionate leave of them, and went away.

And when Erminie wished to see her brother she had to get a pass from the provost marshal's office, and cross the river, and visit him in camp, in one of the forts of the lines forming the southern defenses of Washington.

All this time Major Fielding passed his days reclining in an easy-chair under the shade of the vine-wreathed porch, reading, smoking and recruiting his strength.

Young Ethel went every day to the Navy Department, with which he seemed to have a great deal of business.

Britomarte and Erminie went daily to the hospitals, with kind words and good gifts to the soldiers.

And what was Elfie doing. For one thing, she was making great havoc in the heart of the young lieutenant, who had been, from the first, fascinated by her elfin charms; and, for another thing, by the mysteriousness and eccentricities of her appearance and deportment, she was exciting all manner of disagreeable conjectures concerning herself among her surrounding friends.

She was not encouraging her young adorer; far from it, she was snubbing him in the most contemptuous manner possible, by either ignoring his offered attentions entirely, or else repelling them carelessly, as she would have brushed off a troublesome fly.

She grew moody, silent and unsocial. She studied "Casey's Tactics" all day long, except an hour in the morning, which she spent in drilling. She borrowed her father's rifle and went through the exercises with it, while the quiet drawing-room of the parsonage echoed with "the accents of an unknown tongue."

"Shoale-dore—hums! Pre-sent—hums! Shoale-dore—hums!"

"For you see, Britty, I notice that the drill officer on parade don't say 'shoulder,' but 'shoale-dore!' nor 'arms,' but 'hums!' and I want to be right by drill and not dictionary," Elfie explained to Miss Conyers, who sat watching her performance in amazement.

"But Elfie, my dear, why do you go through all this?" she inquired.

"Don't you wish I'd tell you?" mocked Elfie, trailing arms and panting for breath.

"Indeed I do. What is it, Elfie?"

"Why, that's the mystery; but it may come out in a few days, as the doctor said of the measles, or the cat of the mouse, I forget which."

"Elfie, what are you talking of, love? Mystery, measles, mouse—what do you mean?"

"When does the draft come off?" inquired Elfie, without answering Britomarte's question.

"Next week."

"Then next week you will find out what I mean."

"How?"

"That's all."

And that was all, for not another word of explanation could Britomarte get from Elfie.

The next morning after this conversation Justin paid one of his rare visits to the parsonage.

He informed his sister that he was promoted to the rank of corporal, and laughingly pointed to the chevrons on his sleeves.

Major Fielding, who was much better, and was expecting to be ordered to his regiment, chuckled as he congratulated Corporal Rosenthal.

"Your promotion is the second step up the ladder of military fame, on which your enlistment was the first step; and, let me remind you, my boy, that half the greatest generals the world has ever known were men who rose from the ranks. Why, Lord bless my soul, boy, I myself enlisted as a private soldier, and see where I am now," said the major, with a little pardonable egotism.

"But, in any case," sighed Erminie, "Justin's promotion must be very tedious."

"Not at all," said the major. "He will rise as fast as he learns. A young man like our volunteer here is not going to be overlooked in the lines. He will be promoted as fast as possible. The regiment is not filled up yet, you know. New companies are being formed. And I will guarantee, before the regiment marches, Justin will have received his captain's commission."

"Heaven send it!" aspirated Erminie.

"Dear sister, and good friends," said Justin earnestly, "I beg you to understand that I did not enter the army to seek my own advancement, but to do my duty to my country."

"I know that, Justin," said Erminie, "know it well; but——"

"Advancement will be your destiny whether you seek it or not," said the major.

As time was up, and Justin had to be back in camp by the evening roll-call, he took leave of his sister and friends and departed.

The prophecies of Major Fielding were fulfilled. Justin rose rapidly from the ranks. The next time he visited his sister he wore the badge of a sergeant upon his sleeves. And he delighted Erminie with the announcement that the colonel of his regiment had notified him that he should have a lieutenant's commission in a company that was then being formed of new recruits, and had also hinted at still further advancement.

CHAPTER IV.

ELFIE ENROLLED.

At length the draft commenced, and the city was in a pretty state of excitement. There were hundreds of youths who had been withheld by the authority of parents or the persuasions of friends from volunteering, but who were now in great hopes of being drafted and "made to do as they liked." And there were hundreds of men whose health had never been known to suffer before, but who now suddenly fell ill of grievous disorders. Never—no, never since the cholera of '32, had the city been so

sickly. Never were so many people at one time affected with so many aches and pains. It was as if Pandora's box had been then and there opened for the first time, and all the maladies to which flesh is heir had been sown broadcast over the district. And never had there been such deplorable destitution; never so many old grandmothers, widowed mothers, orphaned sisters, and motherless children dependent upon men for support.

But what else could be expected?

All, or nearly all, the heroes had volunteered long before the enrollment; and the men who did not were either serving humanity in some other way, or else lacked the power or the will to serve their country.

But in all the excited multitude not one was more excited than our Elfie.

Every morning when the paper came she was the first to seize it; and she would let her coffee grow cold while she read out the list of drafted men to the company at the breakfast table.

And on the day on which the draft for her sub-district was to come off, Elfie was very nearly beside herself. She could not be easy for one moment. She rambled all over the house and grounds in the most restless manner. She drilled a little while, and then she threw aside her rifle and recommenced her rambles. She bought every edition of the evening papers, ex ras and all, and read the list of drafted men; but at the very latest issue the list was incomplete, and Elfie was discontented.

In the morning she was the first one downstairs, watching for the early paper. It came, and the list was complete. But on this occasion, for the first time, Elfie omitted to read it aloud, and apparently no one had interest enough in the subject to try their eyes over the small type. But Elfie, who had been insane herself with anxiety on the preceding day, seemed mad with exultation on this. She laughed at everything and at nothing. She sang and danced all over the house, and drilled more than ever.

"Really, Elfie," said Erminie, "one would think that yesterday you had been in an agony of suspense lest some favorite brother or friend should be drafted, and that to-

day you are in an ecstacy of joy on perceiving that he has."

"Never mind, you'll soon see.

'We are coming, Father Abraham,
Five hundred thousand more,'"

replied Elfie, singing and dancing out of the room.

In two or three days they did know. It was one morning after breakfast.

Major Fielding had walked out for the first time since he was wounded.

Miss Conyers had just dropped in for a morning call.

Erminie, Elfie, Britomarte, and Lieutenant Ethel were assembled in the drawing-room, discussing the one great topic of the day, the very last battle, when there came a ring at the bell, followed by the entrance of Uncle Bob, bringing a large, formidable-looking letter, and gazing around in perplexity, as doubting to whom to deliver it.

"Penny pos', miss," he said at length, appealing to the young mistress of the house.

But Elfie sprang up and darted past every one, and seized the letter, exclaiming:

"It is for me!"

"For you, Elfie? That letter!" said Erminie, in incredulous surprise.

"Yes; if you doubt it, look at it!" replied Elfie, triumphantly, turning the back of the letter to the whole group, so that each one could read its superscription.

It was a long, large, yellow envelope, bearing on its upper right-hand corner the words: "Provost Marshal's Office. Official Business. Directed to Sydney Fielding."

And exclamations of wonder broke from all present.

"It cannot be for you, Elfie. It is from the Provost Marshal's office, and on official business. You can have no official business with the Provost Marshal, my dear," said Erminie.

"Can't I?" mocked Elfie.

"You'll hear presently—

"'We are coming! we are coming! our Union to restore——'"

"Elfie, dear, do stop singing, and be reasonable. This

letter is directed to Sydney Fielding. There must be a mistake. Sydney Fielding!"

"Well, what is my name? Isn't it Elfrida Sydney Fielding!"

"Yes, but——"

"Just so. The Elfrida's left out. I had it left out on purpose. Not that I intended to claim exemption on that account, like the poltroom Jonson, who tried to get off on the ground that the enrolling officer had spelt his name wrong, naturally writing it 'Johnson.' This summons is directed to Sydney Fielding, which means me, Elfrida Sydney Fielding, since there is no other Sydney Fielding in existence, and I shall respond to it."

"Summons! Enrolling officer! Whatever do you mean, Elfie?" inquired Erminie, in growing amazement, which was fully shared by young Ethel.

As for Britomarte, she seemed to know, or guess, the meaning of the whole affair.

"Wait a minute!" said Elfie, breaking the broad seal, and reading the letter, which was half print and half manuscript.

Her companions watched her impatiently.

"I knew it!" she exclaimed, jumping up and singing:

'We are coming, we are coming, our Union to restore!'"

"Oh, Elfie! Elfie! are you quite distracted?" exclaimed Erminie, in distress.

"No, my dear, I am not 'distracted'; I am only drafted!" said Elfie.

"Drafted!" exclaimed all, in a breath.

"Yes, drafted, friends and fellow-citizens!"

"Elfie, you are crazed," said Erminie.

"No, not 'crazed'—conscripted! You always hit upon the right initial, but not on the right word!" replied Elfie.

"You do not mean to say, in sober earnest, that you are drafted, Miss Fielding? Such a thing was never heard of! Women have enlisted, and have served; but always when disguised as men. I never in my life heard of a woman being drafted. Such an event would be impossible," said Lieutenant Ethel.

"'Impossible!' Lor!" mocked Elfie. "Are you so young and green as not to know impossible things con-

stantly happen? And here is the proof in black and white."

"If that document is the official summons of a drafted man, it proves beyond a doubt that it was never intended for you," urged the young officer.

"For whom, then?" mockingly inquired Elfie.

"Why, of course, for some individual who was enrolled under that name."

"All right! I was the individual enrolled under that name."

"You, Elfie!" exclaimed all her companions, in a breath.

"Yes. You see, two officers came along for names, and I just thought I better add mine to the list, so I gave them Sydney Fielding and they put it down, thinking it represented a man;" and Elfie laughed merrily.

"Will she be so mad as to act upon the summons?" inquired young Ethel, in consternation.

Britomarte laughed. Erminie sighed. Neither could answer his question.

To the confusion of all her friends, Elfie did act upon that summons. When Erminie went in search of her to try to persuade her to abandon her wild project, Elfie was nowhere to be found.

Britomarte and Erminie went their morning rounds of the hospitals, and returned home to dinner. But Elfie did not appear. Neither, luckily, did her father. The two friends went out again on their afternoon rounds, and returned to tea. They found Major Fielding walking up and down on the porch. He greeted the young ladies cordially, and apologized for his unexpected absence from the dinner table by explaining that he had met a brother officer, who had carried him off to dine at Willard's. Then he inquired:

"Where is my girl? I haven't seen her since I came home."

"She is in her room, perhaps," answered Erminie, uneasily, but hoping earnestly that Elfie might be found there.

Erminie hurried into the house, and upstairs to Elfie's chamber, where, sure enough, she found the girl, with

her bonnet and shawl thrown carelessly upon the floor, and herself sitting down on the sofa, sulking.

"Oh, Elfie, dearest, I am so glad to see you back again. We have been so anxious about you all day. Where have you been, darling?" exclaimed Erminie, going toward her.

"Where have I been? To the Provost Marshal's office, of course."

"Oh, my dear!"

"Yes, I have. But would you believe it, Erminie, they wouldn't accept me. No, they wouldn't, although I told them all that I told you, and proved to them that I didn't come under any one of the heads of exemption, and that I was both willing and able to serve my country. No; for all I could say they wouldn't accept me."

"Well, I hope here is an end of the whole absurd affair, my dear Elfie. And I am very glad that your good father has not been vexed by hearing of it."

"But here is not an end of it. Erminie, I mean either to serve in the army, as some women are doing at this present moment, or I will furnish a substitute in some able-bodied alien."

"Then, darling, as your father is well off in means, notwithstanding his great losses, I see no objection to your furnishing a substitute, though you are not obliged to do so. I myself have a representative in the field."

"You, Erminie!"

"Yes, dear, and I think it the duty of every wealthy and independent woman in the country to have a representative in the army. But come, your father is waiting for you, Elfie. And tea is ready. Let us go to it."

When told the position of affairs Major Fielding was at first highly indignant, but at length by coaxing, threatening, wheedling, and bantering, Elfie brought her indulgent old father out of his anger, and so far into her way of thinking that he actually did buy her a substitute. He gave five hundred dollars to a fine young foreigner to represent Elfie in the field.

CHAPTER V.

THE LOVERS' PARTING.

Britomarte boarded with a widow of the name of Burton, who had three grown daughters. They lived in a small white cottage, in a large, shady garden, in the northeastern suburbs of the city, and not very far from the parsonage. The mother and daughters supported themselves by taking in plain sewing from the quartermaster's department. As Britomarte was their only boarder, and was contented to share their own simple and frugal meals, her living was inexpensive, and she paid for it by needlework.

Every hour of the day that she did not devote to visiting the hospitals with Erminie, was employed in this work, and the stroke of midnight often found her still at her needle. And yet, with all this industry, Britomarte could scarcely make enough to pay her small expenses.

Justin and Erminie guessed all this, and felt great but vain regret; for so long as Miss Conyers remained so obstinately proud and independent, they could do nothing on earth to assist her.

One afternoon she sat diligently sewing on a coarse blue jacket, when Mrs. Burton came up to her room and told her that there was an old colored man below asking to speak to her.

She went downstairs and found Uncle Bob, who handed her a note from Erminie.

"It was very short, and ran thus:

DEAR BRITOMARTE: Please come to me at once, for I am in great distress. ERMINIE.

"What is the matter, Uncle Bob?" she inquired.

"Ma'am?"

"Is there anything amiss at your house?"

"No, ma'am, not as I knows of. Miss Erminie is crying, but I ain't heern no bad news."

Britomarte ran up to her room, and put on her bonnet and shawl, and came down and joined the old servant, and started for the parsonage. But her fleet steps soon

distanced his feeble ones, and she arrived at the house first, and hurried immediately to the library, where she found Erminie in tears.

"What is it all, my dearest?" inquired Miss Conyers, throwing off her bonnet and shawl, and taking Erminie in her arms.

"Oh, Britomarte, I have no courage at all when the test comes," sobbed Erminie, dropping her head upon the bosom of her friend.

"But what is it, dearest?" again inquired Miss Conyers, with a misgiving heart.

"Oh, can't you imagine? Oh, Britomarte, the brigade has marching orders at last. It is to leave in the boats this evening."

Even Britomarte for an instant reeled under the blow, but in another she rallied and replied:

"That is well. We don't want any more camp heroes, Erminie."

"But it is so sudden. True, we were expecting this, or rather hearing of it, every day. But it had got to be an old story. I began to think that the brigade would remain in the forts, when about an hour ago came an orderly sergeant with this note from Justin—listen to it," said Erminie, unfolding a little note and reading:

Headquarters of the ——
Fort——

MY DEAREST SISTER: We have received our marching orders. We go by the six o'clock boat this afternoon. I will try to see you before we leave. If I cannot get to the house, will you be at the wharf? And as you love me, send for Britomarte, and prevail on her to remain with you at the house, or accompany you to the wharf, as the case may require. Heaven bless you both.

JUSTIN.

"It is now two o'clock. Shall you stay here or go to the wharf?" inquired Britomarte, in a tremulous tone.

"I shall remain here until five o'clock. If he does not come before that hour, I shall know that he will not come at all, and that the only chance we shall have of taking leave of him will be at the wharf," replied Erminie.

"My darling, if he is not here within a very few moments, he will not be here at all; for you know he must leave himself time enough after visiting you to get back to camp to march his company."

"That is true. Still, it is not worth while for us to leave the house before five o'clock, as they will not be at the boats before half-past five," said Erminie.

"You are right," agreed Britomarte.

"And oh! I still hope that he may come here. It will be dreadful to have to bid him good-by at the wharf, in the multitude of men. But if I do have to go to the wharf, you will go with me, Britomarte?" pleaded Erminie.

"Certainly," replied Miss Conyers.

"And oh! Britty, Britty, if you would only give him a little hope—a little hope to cheer him on his way."

"Don't speak of it, Erminie, I would die for your brother rather than sacrifice my principles so far."

Erminie sighed and forbore to reply.

"Where is Elfie?" inquired Miss Conyers, to change the conversation.

"She is packing her father's portmanteau. He, too, leaves us to join his regiment to-morrow; and Ethel goes the day after. We shall have a lonely house here, Britomarte."

"You will fill it with refugees from the South, never fear," said Miss Conyers, cheerfully.

Even while she spoke, the door bell rang sharply.

"That is Justin!" Erminie exclaimed, springing to her feet and running out to meet him.

Britomarte remained pale and breathless where Erminie had left her.

There was a sound of meeting, and of sobbing, and of cheering words, and then the brother and sister entered the library.

Britomarte arose and gave her hand to Justin. He pressed it in silence. They could not trust themselves to speak just then.

"How long—can you stay with us, my brother?" said Erminie, striving hard to control her emotion and to speak with composure.

"I may remain with you until five o'clock, dear. My first lieutenant will march my company to the boat, and I have leave to join it there."

"Thank Heaven for so much grace!" replied Erminie, as she turned and left the room.

She went out from a two-fold motive—to order a dainty dinner prepared, so that they all might partake of one more meal together, and also to give her brother the opportunity of making one more last appeal to his obdurate love.

When they were left alone together, Justin and Britomarte remained for a few moments silent and motionless. Both were too full of suppressed emotion to trust themselves to move or speak.

Justin was the first to master himself. When he had done so, he approached Britomarte, stood before her a moment, and then, taking her hand, said, in a tone thrilled with passion:

"I promised you never again to speak of the subject nearest my heart."

"Then keep your promise, Justin," she said, in a gentle, solemn voice.

"You will not free me from it?"

"I cannot."

"Britomarte!"

"Well?"

"Do you know why, after so long a delay, we have at length received such sudden marching orders?"

"I do not."

"Nor yet where we are going?"

"No."

"I will tell you. We are ordered to C——, to reinforce General M——, who is hourly expecting a battle."

Britomarte started as if she had suddenly received a stab; but quickly recovered herself, and firmly replied:

"Then I congratulate you, Justin. I would to Heaven I could stand at your side—your brother-in-arms—on the day of battle!"

"So would not I," said Justin, gravely; "so would not I. But, Britomarte, you have it in your power to give my arm great strength, if you please to do so."

"Love of your country should be all sufficient to nerve your arm, Justin," she answered, earnestly.

He took her hand, and sought to read her face; but she turned away her head to conceal the emotion she could not quite control.

They were interrupted:

"'Malbrook is bound to the wars!
Malbrook is bound to the wars!
Malbrook is bound to the wars!
And I hope he'll never return!'"

sang Elfie, dancing into the room.

"So you are really off, are you, Justin?" she inquired, giving him her hand.

"Yes, Elfie—really off at last," replied Justin, smiling.

"Well, so is my governor, and so is my substitute. And I wish with all my heart and soul that I was going, too! But, you see, I have given my pap my sacred word not to enlist, unless my substitute jumps the bounty, or gets himself killed or taken prisoner!" said Elfie.

Erminie, hearing the voices in the library, thought it would be of no use for her to remain out any longer, depriving herself of her brother's society. So she came in. And after that the conversation, under the auspices of Elfie, became general and cheerful.

A very nice dinner was served at four o'clock. And Justin and the three young ladies sat down to it together.

Major Fielding and Lieutenant Ethel were not at home and not expected before six o'clock.

After dinner Erminie sent out for a carriage.

"You must let us ride down to the wharf with you, Justin, and see you off," said his sister.

"Yes, yes—it is just what I wish," he answered.

"Britomarte, dear Britomarte, you, too, will go with us," pleaded Erminie.

"Of course I shall, love," murmured Miss Conyers, in reply.

"Elfie dear, I know that you must stay here to receive your father when he comes in to dinner, else I would ask you also to go with us," said Erminie.

"Thanks for nothing!" laughed Elfie. "I can't go, and I don't want to go; and as Captain Rosenthal is neither my brother nor my lover, there is no necessity for me to go."

The carriage was at the door at five o'clock.

Justin took leave of Elfie, left his regards for Major Fielding and Lieutenant Ethel, and then entered the

carriage where Britomarte and Erminie were already seated.

A half hour's rapid driving brought them to the steamboat wharf, which was now a scene of great excitement.

The troops were embarking; and a great number of people—relatives, friends, and even mere acquaintances were assembled to see them off.

The regiments were embarked by companies. And while one company would be passing into the boat in files, those remaining on the wharf were "at rest."

Some were devouring fruit and cakes at the stands on the grounds; some buying papers of the newsboys, who were crying the last victory; some were shaking hands with friends; and others, many others, were bidding good-by to mothers, wives, sisters, or sweethearts, assembled there "to see the last of them."

In the crowd one boy attracted Britomarte's attention. Though he wore the uniform of a soldier, he did not seem to be more than fifteen years of age. A bright, spirited-looking lad he was, but he seemed quite alone in that crowd. No one accosted him, and he spoke to none. Britomarte watched him with some interest.

"He belongs to my company," said Justin.

Britomarte and Erminie now got out of their carriage and stood with Justin, until the company immediately before his own fell in to the order to embark. Then it was the turn of Justin's company to form.

"I must leave you now, Erminie! be a woman, my little girl!" said Justin, hastily but fervently pressing his sister to his bosom.

"God bless you! Oh! God bless you, my brother!" she cried, trying hard to swallow and keep down her sobs and tears.

"Good-by, Britomarte!" said Justin, solemnly giving her his hand.

"Good-by! May God strengthen your arm, and preserve your life in the battle, and send you back with victory. Good-by!" she answered, wringing his hand and dropping it, and turning away her head to hide the strong emotion all but too manifest in her countenance.

A sigh reached her ear, and then the piteous words:

"Well, there is no one in the world to bid me good-by,

or to ask God to bless me. Oh, well, so much the better may be, for if I'm killed there'll be nobody's feelings hurt."

Britomarte looked up.

It was the lonely boy who had spoken, and now he stood there with a smile that was more touching than tears could have been.

"Yes, my boy, I will bid you good-by, and pray God to bless you, and to bring you back to us safe!" she said, taking the lad's hand, stooping and pressing a kiss upon his brow.

Justin saw it all; but not a shade of jealousy clouded his own mind. He understood Britomarte too well.

"God bless you for that, noble woman!" he whispered. "I will look after the lad as though he were my younger brother, or yours."

And these were Justin's parting words to Britomarte.

While he was leading his men aboard the boat, Britomarte and Erminie returned to the carriage, where they sat watching until the few remaining companions embarked and the boat steamed away from the wharf.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GUERRILLA'S WIFE.

Erminie grieved bitterly over the departure of her brother; yet neither she nor Britomarte would have kept him back even if they could have done so. But she wept and prayed through the whole of the succeeding night. Only the reflection that he was doing his duty to his country, and the belief that her prayers for his safety would be heard in heaven, at length sufficed to console her.

The next morning she had no time to grieve and but little to pray. A busy and exciting day was before her.

Early in the forenoon, Lieutenant Ethel, with earnestly grateful acknowledgments of the affectionate hospitality he had enjoyed for so many weeks, took a sorrowful leave of the parsonage.

It is true that he need not have hurried away to join

his ship at Baltimore that day. But a fine sense of delicacy suggested to him a certain impropriety in his remaining the guest of a house where there were only two young ladies left to entertain him. So he took leave a few hours previous to the departure of Major Fielding.

In the afternoon Major Fielding took an affectionate leave of his daughter and their hostess, and left the city to join his regiment.

And now that he was gone, Elfie ran upstairs, away up into the attic, where she felt sure of being free from interruption, and she locked herself in and gave herself up to a good crying spell.

She heard Erminie looking for her in the empty chambers below, doubtless with the intention of offering her consolation, and she held her breath to keep from being discovered. Presently she heard Erminie give up the search and go downstairs.

And soon after Elfie also arose, wiped her eyes and stole down to her own room, where she washed her face, brushed her hair and arranged her dress. And then she ran down to the library and joined Erminie.

"I feel very sorry that your father has gone, Elfie," said the gentle girl, in a sympathizing tone.

"So do I. But then he's gone 'where glory waits' him, and all that, you know, and—it's a great relief!"

Here a sharp, loud, impatient ringing of the door bell put a sudden stop to the conversation.

"That's Britomarte, now," exclaimed Erminie, starting up.

"No, it isn't. It's not her ring," cried Elfie.

Then both paused and listened while Old Bob opened the door.

A minute passed, and then the library door was opened by the old man, who announced:

"Madame Vittorio Corsoni!"

And to the unbounded astonishment of the two girls, she who was once Alberta Goldsborough entered the room.

"Oh, Alberta! Alberta! I am so glad to see you, love!" exclaimed Erminie, forgetting the guerrilla's wife, and impulsively springing up to meet with an overflowing welcome her beloved old schoolmate.

Elfie never budged.

"Glad—glad to see me whom you Unionists term a rebel? In truth, I had not expected this, Erminie," said the visitor, pushing further off her face the long rusty black veil that had nearly concealed it.

Erminie's countenance changed, her frame trembled, and her tones vibrated with emotion, as she replied:

"I am grieved, Heaven knows how deeply grieved to hear you say so, Alberta."

And then Erminie paused, in doubt as to what she should say or do next.

Had the visitor been her own personal enemy coming to her in this seemingly inoffensive guise, she would have made her very welcome, and treated her very kindly.

But her country's enemy was another affair Had she the right to entertain a secessionist? Would it not be aiding and abetting secession?

Erminie hesitated in much distress of spirit. Her gentle heart pleaded for the worn and sorrowful-looking woman before her, but her scrupulous conscience warned her not to yield to these feelings.

While Erminie thus hesitated, the visitor turned to Elfie, and said, in surprised recognition:

"Why, this is Elfrida Fielding, is it not?"

"Yes, that's my name, and it is very nearly all that the Confederates have left me," answered Elfie, without even raising her eyes to the face of the questioner.

"And have you no welcome for me, Elfie?" sadly inquired Alberta.

"No. I should have no welcome for my grandmother, were the old lady a guerrilla's wife," relentlessly answered Elfie, averting her head.

"But I am no guerrilla. And I have taken the oath of allegiance, or you would not see me here," said Alberta, with a strange, discordant laugh.

These words seemed to set Erminie's spirit free.

"Have you? have you? Oh, have you, indeed, Alberta? Then you are welcome! welcome! thrice welcome! to my heart and home, and to our country's cause, Alberta. Sit down, love, and rest here, and let me take off your wrappings," she said, gently forcing her visitor into

the easiest chair, and tenderly untying and removing her bonnet.

"You wonder at seeing me here?" said Alberta.

"No, indeed; I wonder at nothing in these days," smiled Erminie.

"I must tell you, however, why I have intruded upon you."

"Your visit is no intrusion, and you shall tell me nothing more, dear Alberta, until you are rested and refreshed. Tea will be ready very soon, and after you have had it, you shall share my chamber, and in its privacy tell me what you like. Just now, it is enough for me to hear that you have returned to your old allegiance, and to see that you are weary and sorrowful."

Again that strange, discordant laugh broke from Alberta's pallid lips, and jarred harshly upon the ears of her hearers.

Erminie felt that she would rather have seen her weep than heard her laugh so strangely. Her act was more like hysteria, or even madness.

The girls had been sitting in the light of the fire, which the chill of the early autumn evening rendered very welcome. But now Erminie arose and lighted the gas. And then they saw their visitor plainly.

Alberta was awfully changed, and Erminie shuddered as she gazed on her. Her dress was all black, but rusty and travel-stained. Her face and form were still beautiful, but the "glory" of their beauty was "obscured." Her once oval face was lengthened and hollowed, her perfect features pinched and sharpened; her fair complexion sunburned, her brilliant hair faded, her graceful form emaciated.

Her whole aspect spoke of the hardships and exposures of the hunted and battling life she led by the side of the guerrilla chief.

Yet one saw, in contemplating this change, that it was, at worst, beauty impaired and not destroyed, and that a few months of quiet happiness might restore it in all its pristine splendor.

"Oh, how much you seem to want repose! Stay with me and rest, oh, poor, storm-beaten friend!" murmured Erminie, gently caressing her visitor.

"I knew that you were humane and tender-hearted, Erminie, and I felt encouraged to come to you—to you of all the world—in the hour of your distress."

"And you have not trusted in vain. I will do everything in my power to serve you, Alberta. Everything, I mean, not incompatible with the service of our country, and of course you would not wish me to compromise my duty to her, for you have taken the oath of allegiance."

An hour later Erminie and Alberta sat together beside the fire in the bedchamber of the former. And there the minister's daughter heard the terrible story of the guerrilla's wife—a story that need not be told in detail here. It is sufficient to say that Alberta Goldsborough, the deli cately-nurtured daughter of the South, had suffered some of the most horrible evils of the Civil War.

Her parents had just become reconciled to her marriage when her father was killed in battle, his house burned to the ground, and her mother turned out to die of exposure and privation.

Alberta, maddened by these sufferings, joined her husband in his wild guerrilla life and incited him to the very worst of those depredations that made his name a terror to all the Unionists of the valley.

In one of his encounters with the Union troops he had been taken prisoner and conveyed to Fort W——, where he had been tried and condemned to death, and where he was then waiting the execution of his sentence.

It was in the desperate hope of gaining a pardon for her husband, that the guerrilla's wife had come to Washington.

Erminie, with tears of pity, told Alberta that she would accompany her to the President, to sue for this pardon.

Accordingly, the next morning, Erminie ordered a carriage and took Alberta to the White House.

But it happened that the President was even more than ordinarily engaged, and they failed to obtain an interview.

This disappointment excited Alberta's anxieties to the utmost pitch, and in her desperation she vowed that if she could not obtain the pardon of her husband she would do that which should place her by his side on the scaffold.

These wild words greatly alarmed Erminie, who, with

much difficulty, persuaded Alberta to come home with her.

There a surprise met them in the shape of a paragraph in the morning's papers announcing the escape of the famous Free Sword from Fort W——.

The joy of Alberta was now as excessive as her previous grief had been. She even apologized for her mad threats.

Erminie persuaded her to take some refreshment and to go and lie down.

In the midst of all her distress about Alberta, she felt also a growing anxiety concerning Britomarte.

Another day was passing, and Miss Conyers had not made her appearance at the parsonage.

Erminie feared that she was ill, and longed to go to her boarding-house to see her, but dared not to leave home while so doubtful a guest as the guerrilla's wife was under her roof, and while she was looking for the arrival of her pastor to consult with him as to what should be done in the case of Alberta.

It is true that she might have sent a messenger to inquire after Britomarte, but in the momentary expectation of Dr. Sales' call, she hoped to get the interview over in time to visit her friend in person. She also hoped that Britomarte herself might make her appearance.

So she waited, and the day wore on to the dinner hour. And she now began to think that Alberta was sleeping very long—unusually long, even for an exhausted traveler. It was more than four hours since she had lain down.

Erminie stole softly up to her chamber, noiselessly opened the door and peeped in.

The room was quiet and shaded, and the white curtains were drawn around the bed; so she softly closed the door and stole quietly downstairs again.

Another hour passed, and Erminie began to grow uneasy and Elfie impatient.

Again Erminie stole up to the room and peeped through the door. No change since she was there last.

All shady, cool and quiet as before.

She stole to the bedside and drew the curtains.

The bed was empty.

She drew back with something like a shock, and glanced hastily around the chamber.

Bonnet, mantle, parsol, and reticule were all gone.

Not a doubt now remained upon the mind of Erminie that the guerrilla's wife had gone away. But whether to return again Erminie could not decide. While she stood perplexed in the middle of the room, a scrap of paper attached to the toilet pin-cushion caught her eye. She went and unfastened it, and read the penciled words:

"Thanks and blessings, and good-by."

CHAPTER VII.

BRITOMARTE DEPARTS.

Early the following morning Erminie arose very much refreshed and invigorated by a good night's rest.

After breakfast, accompanied by Elfie, she went the rounds of the hospitals.

At two o'clock she sent Elfie home, while she herself went to Britomarte's boarding-house.

A sickening presentiment of evil overcame her as she entered the little gate, walked up to the door and rapped.

Mrs. Burton opened the door.

"Oh, Miss Rosenthal! how do you do? I have been hoping that you would call. Please to come in," said the mistress of the house.

"Mrs. Burton, how is Miss Conyers? Is she quite well?" anxiously inquired Erminie, as she followed the widow into the little parlor.

"Why, my darling child, she is gone," answered Mrs. Burton, as she set a chair for her visitor.

"Gone!" echoed Erminie, in dismay, sinking into the offered seat, and gazing at the speaker.

"Yes, my dear—gone. She has been gone these three days."

"And without taking leave of me!" said Erminie, in a sorrowful voice.

"My dear, she left a letter for you. And I ought to have sent it over before this. But you see I had nobody to send it by but one of my daughters. And we are all

so busy working upon a lot of havelocks that must be finished by Saturday that we can't take time to eat or sleep, or hardly to say our prayers. But I did mean to steal time to bring the letter over to you this blessed evening. I will go and get it now," said the widow, leaving the room.

"Gone! I can scarcely realize it. Though indeed she has often hinted to me that she might leave the city at any moment," said Erminie, as she arose to receive the letter from the landlady, when the latter returned to the room and put it into her hand.

Britomarte's letter was dated on the very evening of the day on which Justin's regiment had marched. It was written in Miss Conyers' usually firm and clear chirography, and ran thus:

MY DEAR AND GENTLE FRIEND: Duty, or what I believe to be such, calls me hence very suddenly. I have no time to bid you farewell in person, even if I could trust myself to such a parting interview. From time to time I will write and let you know where and how I am. I hope that you also will keep me advised of your well-being. For the present, a letter addressed "B. C., Baltimore Post Office, till called for," will find me. Give my love to Elfie. And, dear and good Erminie, accept my love and my prayers, which are always offered up for you.

BRITOMARTE.

Erminie was so much astonished that she was incapable of action for several minutes, then she hurried home and wrote to Britomarte, entreating her to return to Washington, or at least to write and satisfy her anxious friends as to her prospects.

By return mail she received an answer, in which Miss Conyers thanked her for her affectionate interest, but begged her to dismiss anxiety and trust Britomarte's welfare to Britomarte's wit.

But Erminie's anxiety was only diverted to another quarter. That evening's papers brought news of a severe battle in which Justin's regiment had been engaged, and in which the Union arms were victorious.

And Erminie suffered the most acute anxiety until she received a letter from her brother full of good news of the victory and kind messages to friends, proving that he was quite well.

And Erminie's soul rejoiced in thanksgiving.

Indeed, that summer of victories had so raised the spirits of all loyal people in Washington, as well as elsewhere, that long discontinued festivities began to be resumed; and, among the rest, picnic excursions became frequent.

The fine weather lingered long that season, and the early autumn was followed by an Indian summer of unparalleled beauty and geniality.

In the very midst of that delicious season, when any rational human being, free from care or pain, might have been happy in any place, Elfie grew weary of the pleasant parsonage and wished for a change of scene, "if only for a day," she said.

And so, instigated, no doubt, by the great enemy of mankind, she went about among her young acquaintances—idle young ladies, with nothing to do, and worse than idle young men who had dodged the draft, and she proposed to get up a picnic party to go to—the Great Falls of the Potomac, of all places in the world.

"You know, Erminie," she argued, in defending herself to her hostess, "I have been shut up in this beleaguered city so long, for nearly three years, unable to get into the country on account of the guerrillas, that, indeed, I feel like a prisoner longing to escape."

"But I thought you promised not to leave me," said Erminie, who (though from no selfish motive) disapproved the venture altogether.

"Neither do I intend to leave you. I intend that you shall go, too. Think, Erminie! the weather is so perfectly beautiful! pleasanter than we could have it at any other season of the year. It is just dry and cool and bright enough to be entirely delightful!"

"I would like to oblige you, Elfie dear, and I should not dislike the trip up this river this beautiful Indian summer weather, but I cannot go with you this time."

"Well, upon my word, you 'sainted girls'—as I have heard more than one white-cravated and blue-spectacled young parson call you, are the most stubborn and 'stiff-necked generation' that ever was! I do believe you refuse just out of opposition to me."

"No, Elfie. Listen, dear: During the three days that I was prevented from going to the hospital, one of my

poor boys died. And he wanted to see me, and kept asking for me and looking for me—poor, helpless boy!—as long as he lingered in life. I shall never cease to be sorry for my absence then; and now, as long as there shall remain a wounded and bed-ridden soldier in these hospitals, whom my presence can comfort or cheer, I will never leave the city for a party of pleasure. No dying eyes shall ever again strain themselves to look for me in vain!" said Erminie, gravely and earnestly.

This conversation occurred on the Wednesday of that week.

And the picnic excursion—that most disastrous picnic excursion—was fixed for the following Saturday.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.

We have seen that Miss Rosenthal could not succeed in prevailing on her perverse guest to abandon the picnic excursion. And, indeed, the sanguine young people who came on the next day to the parsonage to arrange with Miss Fielding the details of the festival, contrived to reassure Erminie as to the perfect safety of the expedition.

"The roads are guarded on both sides by our pickets, and the country for miles back is quite free from dangerous characters," said Mr. Allison, a young man of fortune, who had a substitute in the field risking his life in Mr. Allison's stead.

"Besides, we shall all go armed to the teeth, and determined to die if necessary, in defense of the ladies!" said Mr. Jim Mim, a very small young man, with a "wee face and little yellow beard," but with, I do believe, the soul of a hero, for he had done his very best to get into the army, and had been rejected a score of times upon the ground of physical disability.

"I do assure you, Miss Wothenthall, that the danger is altogweder imaginawy. Our awmes are only pwecautionary measures against the bare possibility of mere annoyance; and evwy awangement shall be made for the

comfort of the ladies," lisped Mr. Lew Billingcoo, a very exquisite dandy, whose chief merits lay in a neat little figure, a round little head, a nice little face, and a "cute" little mustache, as to person; and a jet black suit, snow white linen, pure diamond studs, new kid gloves, fresh pocket handkerchief, and a rare hot-house flower stuck into his button-hole, as to dress.

Erminie, convinced against her will, offered no further opposition to the picnic excursion, but set about, with affectionate zeal, to forward the views of the party.

Old Frederica, the cook, was directed to boil a ham and a leg of mutton, and to roast a turkey and a pair of fowls. Erminie herself made lemon pies and pound cakes, besides giving Elfie *carte blanche* to order or prepare anything she liked; for she wished that the hamper from the parsonage should be excelled by none.

Mr. Allison, being the rich man of the party, provided the most costly wines to be procured.

Mr. Montgomery Fitz Smithers, a faint-hearted colossus, furnished a band of music consisting of four pieces.

Mr. Jim Mim, the "feeble but ferocious" hero, nearly ruined himself in the purchase of West India sweetmeats, French candies, English potted meats, and other rare delicacies.

Mr. Lew Billingcoo, the exquisite, contributed himself, his guitar and a bouquet of fragrant exotics for every young lady.

Two of these young men—Mr. Allison and Mr. Mim—had mothers and sisters, who were, of course, members of the picnic; Mr. Smithers had a maiden aunt, and Mr. Billingcoo a grandmamma, who was such a lively old lady that she was always ready for any frolic that might be set on foot by the young people; and these ladies were also to be of the company. Besides these there were many other ladies and gentlemen, making in all a company of thirty or thirty-five.

There were three ways of reaching the Great Falls from Washington and Georgetown. The first was by the River road; but that was in a very bad condition from the constant passage of trains of army wagons and ambulances, and droves of mules and horses. The second by the Conduit road, leading past the new water-works; but

this was objectionable for the same reasons as was the River road. The third way was by the Chesapeake and Ohio canal; and this way was certainly free from the objections that could be urged against the former two.

So, after changing their minds half a dozen times from the River road to the Conduit road, and back again from the Conduit road to the River road, our party gave up both as impracticable, and determined to go by the canal, and to charter the bright little steamboat *Gadfly* to take them. The picnickers wished to pay for this boat by subscription, but Allison, the millionaire, insisted upon taking it in his own name and bearing all the charges for transportation.

A cook, a couple of waiters and a chambermaid, all colored people, were engaged to attend upon the company.

At length the long expected, ardently desired, eventful Saturday came.

An hour's rapid jolting brought the picnickers to the lock in Georgetown, where the little canal steamboat *Gadfly,* with the Union flag flying, lay puffing and blowing as with impatience to receive them. Their colored band of musicians and their colored servants were standing on the deck waiting for them.

The party quickly alighted from their ambulances, and went on board the boat.

The servants speedily unloaded the baggage-wagon and transferred the stores to the deck.

And just as the sun arose the band of music struck up "Hail, Columbia," and the little steamer blew her shrill signal whistle and started for up the country.

Presently they found themselves at the picturesque Chain Bridge military depot, four miles above Georgetown.

"How far do you call it from here to Great Falls?" inquired Ben Allison of one of the young officers of the post, as the steamer was passing through the lock.

"Some call it nine miles only, but I think it nine of the very longest miles I ever traveled," laughingly answered the young man.

The boat passed the lock, steamed on her way, and soon left the Chain Bridge behind.

It was yet early in the day when they reached the Great Falls of the Potomac, where the mighty river, rushing on between huge precipices, clothed with evergreen woods, falls into a vast basin, or cauldron, where, among great, jagged rocks, it roars and foams in frightful eddies and whirlpools.

In that dry Indian summer weather the river was so low at the falls that any brave and dexterous leaper who would not mind risking life and limb by springing from rock to rock, across the whirlpools, might have passed dry-shod from shore to shore.

The boat stopped there.

The military officer in charge of the commissary depot came down from the block-house to see the visitors.

After bowing to the ladies, and shaking hands with Mr. Allison, who was his old acquaintance, and learning that the visitors were a company of picnickers on a party of pleasure, he courteously invited them all to come on shore and accept such hospitality as his quarters were able to afford.

But, knowing from personal experience that the accommodations of the block-house were not of the most tempting description, Allison, on the part of the company, thanked the captain, declined the invitation, and pressed him, instead, to join them at their lunch.

The hampers were brought on shore; a nice, high spot, a natural opening in the forest, was selected; the cloth was laid on the dry, burnished grass, and the feast was spread—a light repast of fruits, cakes and wines, for it was yet too early to think of dinner.

"But how about the guerrillas? Heard or seen anything of Monck and his band of brigands, lately?" inquired Mr. Allison of the captain, as they all gathered around the luncheon, and sat down upon the grass.

"Not a breath, not a sign of them for many weeks past," answered the officer.

"That's good. I'm glad to hear that. I shouldn't like to have a raid made upon our party to-day."

This was said jestingly, and the captain laughed as he replied:

"Oh, no fear of that. The guerrillas keep far enough

away from our neighborhood. 'All quiet along the Potomac,' I assure you."

So in the evergreen wood they chatted, and jested, and laughed over the prolonged luncheon.

At length they all arose from the grass, and began to prepare for their ramble. The ladies hoisted their parasols, the gentlemen put on their wide-awakes, and the whole party, led on by the captain and Mr. Allison, set out on their excursion.

They went first to the Lady's Leap, a lofty rock overlooking the falls, where a lovesick girl was reputed to have taken a fatal leap into the river below.

Next they visited the Devil's Dripping Pan, a great basin of rock nearly circular in form.

Finally they took a look at the Eagle's Eyrie, the highest point of land within many miles of the place.

And then, fatigued with their long ramble, they returned to their boat to rest.

Now, had the programme of the excursion been carried out to the letter, a great mischance might have been averted. But it was not.

Elfie, at least, seemed possessed by the evil one, who inspired her with a love of adventure. She would not hear of terminating the excursion at the Great Falls. It was a glorious afternoon, and having visited the most striking scenes around the Falls, she wished to go further up the river.

The captain, who had returned with them on the boat, sided with Elfie.

"It would be a pity," he said, "to turn back without having seen the fine scenery above. Why, you might even run up as high as the Point of Rocks—a magnificent view."

"To be sure we might," said Elfie; "and even if we should be late in returning, there will be moonlight to come home by. It will be perfectly delightful."

"And we have everything along to make us comfortable," said Allison.

In fact, when the extension of their expedition was once fairly and broadly proposed and discussed, it was unanimously agreed upon.

And it was decided that they should immediately start

for the upper river, should stop and dine at the Point of Rocks, and then return home by moonlight.

Above the Falls the scenery was much finer than it was below. The river was narrower, and higher; and the huge frowning precipices on each shore darker and loftier.

The company, with their lately exuberant spirits somewhat toned down by the fatigues of the day, no longer sang jubilant Union songs with uproarious choruses; but sat silently enjoying the beauty of the scene, or quietly conversing with each other, or listening to Mr. Billingcoo, who, with his guitar in his hands and his eyes turned up, reclined on the deck and sang lispingly to his own accompaniment one of Thomas Moore's sentimental songs.

So glided away the glorious Indian summer afternoon; and as the sun was sinking to his splendid setting, the steamer neared the Point of Rocks.

"We had better stop here. This is a more convenient place to land and dine than we could find without going on some distance above the Point. And, besides, it is really growing late," said Mr. Allison.

The company eagerly assented to the plan, and the boat was stopped where the canal passed under the shadow of a great precipice crowned with pine woods.

"If we can get to the top of this rock, there is a fine tableland well protected from the wind, which I find is rising, and well shaded from the sun by pine trees, and also commanding one of the most magnificent panoramic prospects in the country. That tableland will be an excellent place to dine," exclaimed Mr. Allison, while he and his friends were getting ready to leave the boat.

They found a way to the top of the steep, and the gentlemen climbed carefully, helping the ladies up along with them.

Their attendants followed with the hampers of provisions.

When the whole party arrived at the summit they found a level piece of ground covered with dry grass, and encircled, except upon the river side, with a girdle of pine trees.

While the company were gazing upon the vast pano-

rama around them, and descanting upon its beauties, some of the attendants were building fires on the ground, hanging kettles over the blaze, and putting the hares, quail and partridges, which were already dressed for the gridiron, upon the coals; others were laying the table-cloth and arranging the dinner service.

Mr. Allison having seen to the careful transportation of his costly wines, now joined the group on the edge of the precipice.

Looking down upon the chaos of gray rock below them he smiled and quoted:

" 'The ragged rascals rage round rugged rocks.' Now, I wonder what on earth put that choice specimen of ingenious alliteration into my head?" he laughingly inquired.

"The 'wugged wockth' of courthe," lisped Mr. Billingcoo.

"Yes; but where are the 'ragged rascals?'" laughed Allison.

"Vewy twue! Here are the 'wugged wockth,' but where are the "wagged wathcalth?'" repeated the dandy.

The question was answered by a yell more terrible and ferocious than ever startled a sleeping backwoods settlement when a tribe of ruthless savages woke it up to slaughter.

And forth from the cover of the pine woods leaped a band of fierce brigands, brandishing their bayonets.

CHAPTER IX.

AS THE LION WOOS HIS BRIDE.

One amazed and startled look assured the party that the guerrillas were upon them.

Some of the young ladies fell upon their faces, screaming with terror.

Others turned to fly, but were met and opposed by the bayonets of the guerrillas, who fenced them in on all sides.

Only Elfie stood her ground. She placed her back against the bole of a pine tree and called the frantic girls around her, saying:

"Stand fast! Stand firm! It is the best way—it is the only way!"

"To arms! gentlemen all! Let us die in defense of the ladies!" shouted valiant little Mr. Mim, drawing his slender sword from his cane and throwing himself before the group of young ladies who had now gathered, frightened and trembling, around Elfie as their queen.

Not another man followed his example.

"Surrender, you blasted Yankees, before we make crows' meat of you!" shouted a gigantic guerrilla, who seemed to be the leader of the band, leaping into the centre of the area, followed by many of his men.

Elfie stooped and whispered to her chivalric little champion:

"Mr. Mim, resistance is quite vain! You will only get yourself cut to pieces by these wretches! Throw down your sword!"

"Miss Fielding, I will be cut into ten thousand flinders before they shall come at you and the other ladies!" cried the little hero.

"These are Goldsborough's guerrillas; and the giant who is leading them is the savage Mutchison, his second in command. I know him by his picture in the illustrated papers. Give me your dirk to defend myself, and then surrender, Mr. Mim."

"My dirk! Certainly, if you want it, Miss Fielding; but I will never surrender!" said the little knight, beginning to disengage the required weapon from its resting-place. Then he had to let it go in a hurry, and throw himself upon his guard; for the colossus whom Elfie had called Mutchison was leaping toward him, brandishing his sabre.

Little Mim met and parried the stroke that was aimed at him.

And then followed several rapid passes. But the combat was very unequal. Mim and Mutchison, as to their respective sizes, were like David and Goliath. And poor tiny Mim had no miraculous sling!

There were a few more rapid passes, and then Mutchison sent the rapier flying from Mim's hand, and with a sweeping back stroke struck him under the knees, and brought him suddenly to the ground.

For the first time Elfie screamed, and covered her eyes.

"Now, beg for quarter, you cursed little idiot!" roared the guerrilla, with his foot upon the small hero's chest.

"Never! I'll die before I'll ask my life from you!" answered Mim, defiantly.

"Well, you're a spirited little gnat, that's certain! And I'll give you your life. Get up!" laughed Mutchison, removing his foot from Mim's chest, and turning away to look after his men.

"Come!" said Mutchison, striding into the midst of the area and gazing around upon his "ragged rascals." "Come! I think the first thing to be done is to exchange clothing with these well-dressed gentlemen, so far as they will go; and those among you, my brave boys, who don't get a nice garment, shall have its equivalent in money or jewelry, of which I suppose there is no lack among the company present."

A shout of approbation from the band responded to this speech.

"But the ladies must withdrawn while we make our toilet. Here, Carter, you and Gates march these girls to the other end of the woods and guard them; and, hark you! if any man of you attempts to kiss one of them until I give the word—dash him! I'll hang him as high as Haman!"

Two guerrillas stepped out from the crowd, and, with fixed bayonets, drove the young ladies, like a flock of sheep, to the opposite edge of the pine woods.

"And now to business! I don't like to inconvenience you, my young friends, but necessity has no law! and really our necessities are very great—none of us having had a change of linen for two months past!" said Mutchison.

The greater number of the poor fellows sumbitted ruefully enough to this degrading transformation.

Only Mr. Allison bore the mischance with philosophy.

"There are worse misfortunes at sea!" he said, as he invested himself in a nondescript garment of which it was almost impossible to tell the original form or material, and which now hung about him like sea-weed. "'A little water clears us from this deed!' In other words,

when we get back home, a warm bath and a change of dress will make us all right!" he added.

When the ladies were allowed to return scarcely a gentleman of the party was recognizable. All were in rags that hung about them in shreds like strings, fringes, tags—anything but clothes. Some had hats with a rim, but no crown, others crowns, but no rim; no one had a whole tile, and even those who were favored with half a one had no shoes, and those who had shoes had no hats. Some had trousers whose ragged legs dangled just below their knees, but no coats; others had apologies for coats, but nether garments of which the less said the better.

"And now for feast and dance," roared the great Mutchison, and presently by moral suasion or physical force the whole company were seated on the grass and doing their best to enjoy the dinner.

Meanwhile the sun had set; and Mutchison ordered some of his men to light pine knots and hold them aloft, to illuminate the scene.

And a score or two of these primitive torches made the whole area sufficiently light.

When at length the feast came to an end, Mutchison rose from his seat, crying:

"A dance! a dance! Strike up the Virginia reel, darkies. That is the figure that will take in an unlimited number of performers. And here is a natural hall large enough to allow a reel a quarter of a mile long. And dash me to dust if every man-jack sha'n't join! Take your partners, gentlemen; I've got mine!"

And, instigated by the very spirit of mischief, he seized a lively old lady, who was too wise to resist, and trotted her off to the head of the reel to open the ball.

"Come, my little miniature hero; don't be backward! Bring the lady of your worship along," cried Mutchison.

And Elfie, to keep her little champion out of trouble, drew him into the reel.

Suddenly, in the midst of these orgies, a cheer was heard from the men in the background. And an officer, mounted, and attended by his staff, galloped up in the midst of the area.

"My traitor!" exclaimed Elfie, under her breath, as she recognized Albert Goldsborough.

A very handsome man was this guerrilla chief—this licensed brigand, who bore a colonel's commission. He was taller and stouter than when first presented to the reader; his hair and beard were of a darker and richer auburn; his face and figure more martial and dignified than heretofore.

So Elfie thought as she covertly watched him.

He dashed into the midst of his band and raised his hand, exclaiming:

"Break up your bivouac! Boots and saddles! A squadron of the enemy's cavalry are out in search of us, and they have struck our trail!"

A yell of defiance responded to this announcement, as the men all started to go in search of their horses, which were left tied in the pine woods.

A few men, however, remained, guarding the prisoners.

"Leave these people to find their way home as they can! We cannot be encumbered with them! And Mutchison! seize that girl and bring her along after me! that girl in the claret-colored dress!" cried Goldsborough.

"Claret?" repeated Mutchison, looking around in perplexity, for he was very considerably "fuddled."

"Seize the girl in the red stuff gown, and bring her after me!" cried Goldsborough, as he turned and rode off.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mutchison.

And without more ado he pounced upon Elfie, threw her over his great shoulders and bore her off, she screaming and struggling violently, in the direction taken by Goldsborough.

Little Mim sprang instantly to the rescue, gave chase, overtook the giant, and attempted to stop him by seizing his leg. The act nearly threw the guerrilla down, but he quickly recovered himself, whirled around, and with the iron handle of his sword aimed a blow on the head of Mim, which struck the little hero, bleeding and senseless, to the ground.

"Oh, you villain! I'll have you hanged for that!" screamed Elfie.

"Oh, no, you won't! I'll give you a better sweetheart

than that little fellow!" laughed Mutchison, and he continued his flight, no one else daring to stop him, until he reached a clearing in the pines where the whole cavalry force of Goldsborough's guerrillas were preparing to mount.

Colonel Goldsborough was in the midst.

"Mutchison, set that girl on the horse behind me, and secure her to my waist with these two straps!" said Goldsborough.

And Mutchison prepared to obey.

Now, had Elfie been a very dignified young lady she would have been too proud to resist where resistance was vain. But Elfie had more temper than dignity. And so she fought, and kicked, and scratched and bit, and screamed and scolded with all her might and main, and left upon the face of Mutchison marks of her teeth and nails that he would be likely to carry to his grave.

"Thunderation! what a little tiger-cat! Look here, girl, if you leave the prints of your fingers on my face in that style, the men will be taking me for your husband, and the colonel wouldn't like that!" laughed Mutchison.

After much difficulty Elfie was conquered, and bound upon her seat behind her captor, who put spurs to his horse and bore her off in triumph!

CHAPTER X.

A MOONLIGHT FLIGHT.

Having left orders for his men to scatter and spread themselves through the forest and take different roads to their secret rendezvous, the guerrilla colonel took the mountain path and flew over it at a reckless rate, with as little regard to his captive's cries as to his own neck.

Elfie was seated on the horse behind him and securely bound by a strong leathern girdle that passed around her waist and was clasped in front of his.

Elfie never ceased to struggle and to scold. Her arms were free and she could reach his head, so she cuffed his cheeks and pulled his hair with all her might and main. And she poured out scorn like lava on him.

But Goldsborough treated the pummeling and pulling as caresses, and the scolding as compliments; indeed, he scarcely noticed the one or replied to the other; until, after having reached the top of the mountain, they began to descend into a deep wooded dell, by a path so narrow and difficult that it was necessary to slacken speed.

"Unbind me! Put me down! Shame of manhood! how dare you treat me so?" cried Elfie, furiously, seizing his ears and making her nails almost meet through them.

"Blazes! what a little tigress she is, to be sure! I shall have to cut her claws!" laughed Albert Goldsborough.

"I'll cut your throat!" cried Elfie.

"Oh, no you won't, my dear! You will love me too well. You'll love me as well as the Sabine girls loved the Roman youths who carried them off against their wills, just as I am carrying you!" laughed Albert.

"I'll see you hanged first!" fired Elfie.

"Of course you will, my dear—around your neck! Come, come, Elfie! Stop trying to tear my ears out by the roots, for I don't think you'll succeed. And do be reasonable! You don't know what a gay life we are going to lead here in the green wood. Your most romantic dreams will be realized. You'll think that you have slipped out of the nineteenth century and slid down into the twelfth. You'll fancy yourself in Epping forest, living with Robin Hood and his merry men—except that we don't wear Lincoln green, Elfie, but Confederate gray. Come! shall I be your Robin Hood? And will you be my maid Marian?"

"Oh, villain! I hope—I do hope that neither steel nor ball may ever save you from the halter?" gasped Elfie, giving his ears a most vicious wring.

"See here, my girl, we are coming to the ford, and we must be careful! Just give my ears a holiday for a few minutes, will you, while you draw up your feet and fold your skirts up over your lap to keep them from getting wet," said Albert, as they emerged from the wooded gorge of the mountain and descended to the banks of the river, now shining like a stream of fluid silver in the broad moonlight.

"I won't! I don't care if I do get wet, or drown

either! I'd be glad to drown, if I thought I could drown you with me!" exclaimed Elfie.

"See how she loves me! She is willing to meet death itself if shared with me," mocked Albert. "So here we go."

And he plunged into the river.

Splash! splash! splash! they went through the water, making the foam fly in every direction.

The gallant horse, heavily laden as he was, bravely breasted the current, and reached the opposite shore in safety.

"Elfie, my darling, do you know why I made this last raid into Maryland?" inquired the guerrilla, as they struggled up the slippery bank.

"No, nor care, you miscreant!" snapped Elfie.

"Can't you guess?"

"To burn barns, and steal cattle, and rob hen-roosts, I suppose," sneered Elfie.

"No. I went simply to fetch you, and for no other reason in the world," answered Albert.

"Me! How on earth did you know I was there?" inquired Elfie, thrown off her guard by unbounded astonishment.

"By the same means through which I became acquainted with most events that pass in Washington—by my spies. I learned that you were getting up a picnic to go to the Great Falls. And I determined to intercept your return."

"Oh, the traitress! It was Alberta. It was no one but Alberta that informed you. For I remember I mentioned to her at breakfast one morning that I wanted to get up a picnic to go up the river!" indignantly exclaimed Elfie.

"Well, yes, it was Alberta who first told me of the intended excursion. But she did not tell me the day it was to come off."

"No, for the day was not fixed when she ran away, the ingrate, so she could not have told you."

"But one of my other spies, who was a member of your picnic party, could."

"A spy in our picnic party! That is false, you villain! Albert Goldsborough, have you become menda-

cious as well as thievish? The members of our picnic party were loyal. We would have taken no others," angrily cried Elfie.

"As far as you know," laughed Goldsborough, adding: "Now, my dear, I don't mind telling you, because I never intend to let you go back to report it, that there are no people in the world so profuse in their expressions of loyalty as my spies in Washington!"

After some hard riding, the clatter of a horse's feet was heard behind, and the huge form of Mutchison appeared, galloping rapidly after his chief.

Goldsborough halted until his officer came up.

"What news?" demanded the colonel.

"Good. Our scouts come in and report that the enemy's cavalry, out in search of us, have gone off on a false scent, that I took care to have laid for them. Our men have divided themselves in small parties and taken separate roads, and will rendezvous at the Black Bear's Pass, as you ordered. But, good gracious, colonel, now I look at you, have you been in battle?"

"No—except with this little wildcat here, in which she has done all the fighting!" laughed Goldsborough.

"Your ears are each one clot of gore!"

"I dare say, though they feel to me as if they were each one ball of fire! See here, Mutchison—much as I dislike to restrain a young lady, we shall have to confine her hands, or I shall not have an ear, or a lock of hair left on my head! Take this pocket-handkerchief and tie her hands."

"Pity it hadn't been done first, colonel! It would have saved your beauty from being spoiled, and mine, too. Thunderation! I would as leave try to tie a catamount with a thousand claws!" exclaimed Mutchison, as he sought to secure the hands of Elfie, who fought, scratched and bit with so much effect that the guerrilla's face and eyes came to great grief before he succeeded in binding her.

They rode on silently through the woods a little while, and then Goldsborough said:

"We bivouac with the Free Sword to-night, and to-morrow, if the road should be clear, go on to our rendez-

vous at the Black Bear's Pass. I think that we are not very far from Carsoni's encampment now, are we?"

"It is in a clearing in this forest somewhere, and I think that this path leads to it, colonel. We shall see in a little while," answered Mutchison.

"So we stop with the Free Sword, do we, to-night? And we shall see Alberta! And if we do——" exclaimed Elfie, setting her teeth and drawing in her breath.

"You'll tear her eyes out if we leave your hands free," laughed the huge guerrilla.

"Mutchison!" exclaimed Colonel Goldsborough.

"I beg your pardon, colonel. I will say no more," replied the man.

And they pursued their way in silence, until the forest grew thinner, and they seemed to be approaching a clearing.

"I see lights gleaming through the distance. Can they be the campfires of the Free Sword?" inquired Goldsborough.

"Yes, colonel, I think so," answered Mutchison, as they emerged from the thicket into a small, open space.

The next moment they came upon a picket guard, and were challenged.

"Who goes there?"

"Friends!" answered the colonel.

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign."

"I don't know your countersign, but you know me well enough, Robinson. I am Colonel Goldsborough."

"Very sorry, colonel, but I can't let you pass without the countersign."

"I am on a visit to your chief, in answer to his repeated invitations."

"Very sorry, colonel, but it is as much as my life is worth to let you pass."

"Call the corporal of the guard, then, blame you."

The word was passed for the corporal of the guard, who presently appeared upon the scene.

"Here is Colonel Goldsborough wants to pass and doesn't know the countersign," explained the picket.

"You know me well enough, Jenkins," said Goldsborough, addressing the petty officer.

"Yes, sir, but I dare not pass you without my colonel's

orders, though. If you will wait, I will send a messenger up to his quarters," said the corporal.

"Do, then, and be quick about it," exclaimed Goldsborough, impatiently.

While waiting for the return of the messenger, Goldsborough looked about with some curiosity, for this was a new encampment of the Free Sword, to which his brother-in-arms had never been before.

He saw that they were in a very small clearing, where the trees had been cut down to make room and furnish material for a picket's hut, that stood in the very midst of the small, open space. Before this hut was burning a fire of brushwood, and around it were three or four guerrillas at rest, beside the sentry on duty.

Presently the messenger returned in attendance upon the Free Sword, who came in person to receive his brother-in-arms.

Vittorio Corsoni was not much changed in personal appearance since we saw him last. Originally very dark in complexion, exposure to the sun, wind and weather could not make him much darker, and he had the same long, black curls, small, white teeth, and large, melancholy eyes—eyes that had so mesmerized every woman who had ever come under their influence, and so bewitched Alberta Goldsborough to her destruction, and he had the same slight, agile and graceful figure that so reminded the beholder of a tiger. He wore a uniform of black cloth, with a crimson sash around his waist, a sword by his side, and a black wide-awake hat, with a black feather, fastened with a great fiery carbuncle.

He walked briskly up to Goldsborough to embrace him after the Italian fashion, and in doing so noticed the young lady on the horse behind him, and he raised his cap to the lady before he offered to greet her cavalier.

Albert bent low from his saddle to meet the advance of his friend, who, after kissing him on both cheeks, started back, exclaiming:

"But, good Heavens, Goldsborough! what has happened to your ears? Have they been torn off?"

"No," laughed Albert; "they have been clawed off, chawed off by this little catamount on the horse behind me!"

"Vittorio Corsoni, don't you know me? I am Elfrida Fielding, your old pupil."

"Know you, fair lady? Perhaps not at first. I am glad to do so now. Welcome to my poor camp," said the Free Sword, removing his hat and holding it in his hand.

"Colonel Corsoni, you used to be a gentleman. You will protect me, I hope, from this miscreant who has torn me away from my friends and brought me here."

"Fair lady, we brothers-in-arms support each other in love as in war," said Vittorio, gently.

"But he brought me here against my will!" cried Elfie, indignantly.

"Sweet lady, stratagem is as fair in love as in war."

"But there was no stratagem. He brought me here by violence!"

"It was the violence of passion inspired by your too delightful beauty. Gentle lady, you must forgive him," answered Vittorio. And then, with a deep bow, he turned away from Elfie, and, addressing Albert, inquired:

"Shall we move forward?"

"If you please, Corsoni," answered Goldsborough.

And the party started—Albert Goldsborough letting his horse pace slowly while Vittorio Corsoni walked by his side.

"I would dismount and walk with you willingly if I were not so burdened and hampered," laughed Albert.

"Burdened with beauty, hampered with happiness," murmured Vittorio, gallantly.

But at the last words of his colonel, Murchison had jumped off his horse, the use of which he now respectfully pressed upon the Free Sword.

Vittorio laughed and accepted it, saying that it would enable him the better to keep up with his companions.

Then they rode slowly on through the bushes, while the two guerrilla leaders conversed in a low tone about the plans of their next campaigns, until they came to a grass-grown old road, on the other side of which was a low stone wall and a rusty iron gate guarded by a small porter's lodge.

Before the gate paced a sentinel, and from the porter's lodge, which was turned into a guard-house, gleamed a dim light.

Corsoni gave the countersign and passed his party into an area that seemed once to have been the ornamented grounds of some magnificent country seat.

A fine old avenue of elm trees led from the lodge to the distant mansion, from the upper and lower windows of which gleamed dim lights.

A sentinel paced to and fro before the house.

Corsoni dismounted and called a guerrilla to take his horse.

Goldsborough unbuckled the belt that held Elfie to him, and beckoned Mutchison to come and lift her off.

Elfie, who had not spoken since her vain appeal to Corsoni, suffered herself to be removed in silence.

Goldsborough alighted and immediately unbound Elfie's hand, saying:

"I beg your pardon for having ordered this, my darling, but if I had not done so, I should have lost my scalp and my ears."

The first use Elfie made of her freed hands was to dash her fists, one after the other, into Goldsborough's face.

He laughed and dodged the blows, and then took one of Elfie's hands to draw in his arm and lead her on.

But the enraged girl snatched her hand away, exclaiming:

"Go on! I will follow, since I must. And if I seem to yield now to circumstances, it is only as the tiger crouches for a surer spring. Albert Goldsborough, I will have your life for this!"

"The devotion of my whole life, Elfie," he answered, gravely.

Corsoni was standing at the foot of the stone steps waving his hands for them to come on.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OUTLAW'S LOVE.

They followed him up into the porch and through the double doors to a broad, unfurnished central hall, where several guerrillas were on guard.

Four doors on the right hand and four on the left opened into rooms on each side of this hall.

Corsoni led the way to the third door on the right hand, saying:

"My dear wife is in there. Had we not better consign Miss Fielding to her care?"

"Thanks, yes! My fair traveling companion has been on horseback, riding hard and exerting herself in other violent exercises for about six hours, and must be greatly in need of aid and comfort just now," answered Goldsborough.

Corsoni opened the door and holding it open, bowed and said:

"Miss Fielding, my dear wife is in there. Will you enter?"

But before Elfie could answer, and, indeed, while Vittorio was still speaking, Alberta herself came out, and taking Elfie in her arms, kissed her on both cheeks, saying:

"Welcome to the greenwood, Elfie!" and drew her into the room.

It was a spacious apartment, with wide fireplace. Over the fireplace was a richly-carved mantel-shelf. In the wall above there was an old fresco painting. A wood fire burned on the hearth. Each side the chimney were tall windows, reaching from floor to ceiling.

Alberta led Elfie into this room, took the pillows off her bed, and put them on the chair, one on the seat and the other against the back, and made Elfie sit down and rest her bruised and tired frame.

"Alberta, had you any hand in this?" said Elfie, bursting into tears.

"In what, dear?" inquired the guerrilla's wife, who was now stooping over the fire, bringing the brands together with her naked hands, because she had no tongs.

"With this outrageous act of bringing me off?"

Alberta made the fire blaze up cheerfully, and then answered:

"When I made my escape from Washington, I fell in with some of Albert's men, who guided me to their colonel. I found that he had been instrumental in the deliverance of my dear Vittorio, who was then with him.

When Albert heard where I had been and whom I had seen, he had a thousand questions to ask about you, all of which I answered as well as I could. Among the rest I told him that you were planning a picnic to the Great Falls. That was all I had to do with your abduction, Elfie."

"Was that, really, all? Did you not encourage him in it?"

"No. At the time I spoke of the proposed picnic I had no idea that he would dream of such a desperate deed as to cross the river and seize you, as it were, from between the very teeth of the Federal forces! It was a mad act; but he loves you madly, Elfie!" said the guerrilla's wife.

She then passed to the door and called one of her husband's men, and in a low tone gave him an order, and then she drew a stool to the side of Elfie and sat down, saying:

"I am the only woman in the encampment, and I have to wait upon myself or be waited on by men. I generally prefer the former. You will sup and sleep alone with me to-night, Elfie, and I will keep you with me, and guard you from annoyance until a chaplain can be found to marry you to Albert, and give him the legal right to protect you."

"Marry me to that guerrilla! Never! Never! It cannot be done legally without my consent, and that they shall never have!"

"But I thought you loved him!" exclaimed Alberta, in dismay. "And he loves you very dearly, Elfie. Have you any idea what he risked when he crossed the river for your sake?" gravely inquired Alberta.

"He risked the halter, I suppose, and I wish to goodness he had got it," answered Elfie, bitterly.

"Yes, he did, heartless girl. He risked capture and an ignominious death for your sake. He risked all, knowingly and willingly, for when, for love of you, he crossed the Potomac, he knew that Scott's Nine Hundred—and they are your guerrillas, Elfie—were on the north side of the river below the Monocacy, and that Rosenthal's cavalry were on the same side above the

Monocacy, and that the scouts of one or the other force would be sure to strike his trail."

"Rosenthal's cavalry!" echoed Elfie, passing over everything else in her surprise at hearing this phrase.

"Yes, Rosenthal's cavalry. You didn't know that Major Rosenthal is in command of the regiment in which he first enlisted as a private soldier, did you?"

"Major Rosenthal! Did you say Major Rosenthal?"

"Yes. He was promoted to a majority for galiantry in the field."

"And he is in command of his regiment?"

"I told you so."

"But how is that?"

"In the very last battle in which his regiment was engaged the colonel was dangerously wounded, the lieutenant-colonel was taken prisoner, and the senior major killed, so that the command of the regiment devolved on Major Rosenthal. His regiment was soon after ordered to W. And he is now crossing the valley. Observe how early and how accurate is our information. Now, to get back to Albert Goldsborough. With Scott's Nine Hundred in Montgomery and Rosenthal's cavalry in Frederick, your lover, when he crossed the river for your sake, rushed recklessly between two fires."

"I wish to Heaven the fires had closed upon him and made an end of him and his horse-thieves then and there!" bitterly exclaimed Elfie.

"You don't! If you ever loved him, you love him still. If you ever loved him, you love him more than ever for the perils he has braved for your sake," said Alberta, positively.

"I tell you——" passionately began Elfie; but she was interrupted by a low rap at the door.

"Come in," said Alberta.

And the door opened and a young guerrilla entered, bringing a kettle of hot water, which he set down on the hearth before the fire, holding in the other hand a paper parcel.

"That is my good boy," said Alberta, as she stirred the fire to make it burn and keep the kettle hot—"that is my good boy! But, Gill, what shall we do for tea? Use saffron root again?"

"No, ma'am! See here. Captain Mutchison sent you this with his compliments," said the young man whom Alberta called Gill, handing over the paper parcel that he had held in his hand.

"Tea! real tea!" said Alberta, holding the parcel up to her face and gratefully inhaling its fragrance. "Oh, tell the captain I am ever so much obliged to him. Elfie, child, I have not had a cup of tea since I took one with Erminie at the parsonage. But I am very glad to have some now, for your sake as well as mine."

"I suspect that tea is a part of the spoils of our picnic," replied Elfie.

"Nothing in life more likely. Now, do you know that circumstance actually adds piquancy to its flavor!" exclaimed Alberta, as she went to an old glass cupboard in a corner of the room and took from it a small tin teapot, in which she poured a portion of the tea, and afterward filled it up with boiling water and set it on the hearth to draw.

Elfie enjoyed the tea in spite of its being picnic spoils, and after Gill had removed the service the two girls drew their chairs to the fire for a chat.

"You do not know, Elfie, what a respite from anxiety it is to me to be sure of one night's undisturbed rest! This storm that is raging outside will lull me to repose as the sweetest music in the world would fail to do," said Alberta, with a sigh of intense relief.

"But how and why?" inquired Elfie.

"Oh, because I know while the storm is raging and the rain is pouring the river is also rising, and the fords will be impassable, and our camp will be safe from attack for one night, and we may sleep in peace. Oh, Elfie, unless you had lived as I have lived for the last three years, in the midst of 'war's alarms,' you could never realize what a blessed relief there is in the feeling sure that we may sleep in peace for one night!"

"Oh! Alberta, what a life for you—for you, a daughter of the house of Goldsborough—reared in luxury and refinement! How can you bear it? Why do you bear it? Why do you not accept Erminie's offer, and seek refuge with her?" earnestly inquired Elfie.

"Why? Do you ask me why?" exclaimed Alberta,

and her cold eyes, fixed upon the fire before her, dilated and burned, and her impassive face glowed as she replied:

"My lot is cast with him and with his cause!"

"Oh, Alberta! when you were in Washington, you told us that you had taken the oath of allegiance, in good faith, and that you meant to keep it! And here I find you among the guerrillas again! sympathizing with them, aiding and comforting them in every way! Have you no respect for your oath, no regard for yourself, no fear even of your God?" inquired Elfie.

A strange smile passed over the face of the guerrilla's wife; still gazing straight before her into the fire, she answered, slowly:

"I have one idol, one religion, one rule of action! Elfrida, nearly four years have passed since I left all, to share the fortunes of Vittorio Corsoni, my beloved! Dark enough those fortunes have been, Heaven knows! But I have never repented becoming his wife—never, Elfie. In all the gloom and horror of our downward course—and downward it is, Elfie—downward even to the depths of hell!—we have the one, great, deep joy of knowing that we go on together, inseparable forever! Yes, on earth or in hades, inseparable forever! I will never again leave him, or be left by him, for a single day. On the only one occasion when we parted since our marriage, he was captured, tried and condemned to die. I found my way to Washington, determined to deliver him or to die with him. Yes, if I could not procure his release, I was determined to do that which should place me by his side in the prison, or send me swiftly after him to the scaffold!"

"Oh, Alberta! you make my blood run cold!" exclaimed Elfie.

"In such a pursuit, what were oaths to me? I had one idol—my Vittorio! one religion—his service! one rule of action—his welfare! Happily his release was effected by a stronger arm and a shrewder wit than mine. And he is with me once more, and henceforth we part no more. Where he stays, I will stay; where he goes, I will go. What he dares that will I dare. The pains and priva-

tions he suffers I will share, and when he ceases to live I will die!"

Alberta ceased to speak, but continued, with her hands clasped upon her knees, to gaze into the fire.

Elfie did not answer these wild words; she remained silent—struck dumb, as it seemed, with astonishment at the vehement earnestness of self-devotion in one she had deemed so cold and calm. What could have inspired Alberta with this self-sacrificing, soul-sacrificing passion?

While Elfie sat gazing into the fire, and musing over these mysteries, there came a soft tap at the door.

Alberta sprang up eagerly and went to open it. The voice of Vittorio Corsoni was heard to say:

"It is late, love. It is nearly two o'clock"

"I know it is," murmured Alberta.

"How will you dispose of your guest?"

"She must sleep with me, Vittorio, dearest. She is but an inexperienced girl; and there is no place in this house, full of rough soldiers, where she can sleep in peace except with me, the only woman in the camp," said Alberta.

A deep sigh from Corsoni followed these words, and then he murmured in a lower tone:

"I had just been congratulating myself that we should all rest, without thinking of an attack to-night! But, as Heaven hears me, I would rather sit with you, and watch all night in the hourly expectation of an assault and a battle, than be banished from you, though we pass the night in peace!"

Alberta replied in a low and tender murmur, inaudible to all but the ears for which it was intended.

A whispered conference ensued, and then Corsoni said:

"Well, love, I shall lie on the floor outside your door to-night, and like a faithful dog will guard your slumbers."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ALARM.

Elfie slept long and deeply that night, with Alberta beside her and Vittorio at the door. In the wild guerrilla camp something like military discipline was kept up, and at four o'clock the *reveillé* was beat; but even the sound of the rolling drum close under her windows failed to arouse this tired young sleeper.

Alberta arose, pale, weary and shivering, in the chilly dawn of the autumn morning.

She opened one of the windows, letting in the faint light of day, and the weight of a heavy dampness.

The storm had passed, the sky was clear, and the air was still. but the ground was strewn thickly with fallen leaves, the trees were bared and broken, and the raindrops hung glittering upon all.

Through the obscurity she could see the huts of the men with their dim fires hastily kindled to cook their breakfasts.

After fastening back the shutters, she let down the window and turned to set the room in order. She drew the chunks of fire together and put on more wood from a pile that lay handy in the chimney corner. Then she filled a kettle from a pail of water in the cupboard, and hung it over the blazing fire.

While thus employed she heard a low rapping at her door, and she went to see who was there.

It was her husband; and he met her as if he had been parted from her for a year.

"May I come in?" at length he said.

"No, dear Vittorio, for our visitor still sleeps. When she is up and dressed, then you may," she answered.

"Heaven knows I bear our fair guest no malice; yet I wish Satan had her rather than she should be here dividing us whom nothing else has ever parted," complained Corsoni.

"So does she, I think!" replied Alberta, with a shrug.

"I am going now. What can I do for you?"

"Send Gill for orders."

Vittorio kissed her suddenly and hurried away.

Alberta went on with her preparations for breakfast. She cut slices from a stale loaf of bread and set them down before the fire to toast. And then she sat down to wait for two events—the appearance of Gill and the awakening of Elfie. She had to wait some time before either event occurred.

"Is it you, Gill?"

"No, madam, it is Haddycraff," answered a voice.

"Haddycraff! Why, where is Gill?" inquired Alberta.

"Can't be found, madam, anywhere in the camp. Seems he hasn't been seen since the height of the storm last night. The men think he has deserted, and that he is no better than a Yankee spy."

"Is that possible?" exclaimed the guerrilla's wife, in amazement.

"It is certain that he has gone, madam, and it is likely he was a spy!"

"That boy—that mere child! Why, he didn't look to be more than sixteen years old!"

"Madam, some of the men say now that they don't believe he was a boy at all, but a woman in disguise."

"Nonsense! What absurd notions they take in their heads."

"It is only some of them, ma'am. There are others that think he is one of Rosenthal's men. Now that his disappearance has set people to thinking and talking, there is one says he is the image of an orderly he saw with Major Rosenthal."

"Yes; doubtless every one of you will have a reminiscence, or a suspicion, or an inspiration regarding the poor lad! What does your colonel say?"

"He says nothing; he acts. He has sent out men in pursuit of the boy, with orders to bring him back, dead or alive!"

When Elfie awoke Alberta told her of the strange disappearance of the boy Gill. Alberta feared that he was a spy, and Elfie prayed that it might be so and that this retreat of the Free Sword might be discovered.

Alberta sadly proceeded with breakfast, and spoke only

in monosyllables, while Elfie, in high spirits, chatted gayly.

They were interrupted by the sound of horses galloping, followed by the tramp of many hasty feet.

The next instant the door was thrown open by the guerrilla Mutchison, who stalked into the room.

The two young women stared up in alarm.

"What is the matter?" demanded Alberta.

"Madam!" exclaimed Mutchison, speaking in haste and trepidation, "the boy Gill has betrayed us! The scouts who went out in search of him have returned and report a body of the enemy's cavalry near!"

And without another word he pounced upon Elfie, lifted her and threw her over his shoulder and bore her, screaming and struggling, from the room.

Alberta started forward to stop him, but before she had gone two paces she met Colonel Corsoni, who came hurrying toward her.

He was armed and equipped for his ride, and he carried in his hand the black hat and feather fastened by the flaming carbuncle button.

"Alberta, dearest—quick! Your horse is ready and waiting beside my own!" he exclaimed. And he seized up her dark hooded cloak and with his own hands wrapped it about her form.

"It is true, then! The enemy is upon us!" she cried.

"Two companies of cavalry, armed with their accursed Henry rifles! sixteen-shooters, that they may load up on a Sunday and fire off all the week! What can my ninety almost unarmed men do against such a force?"

"Oh! fly! fly, Vittorio! And here! take that burning carbuncle from your hat! You are known by it. And its rays shoot so far in the sunlight."

"I would almost as willingly be captured as remove the gem, your gift, Alberta! placed, where it shines, by your hand!"

"Then my hand will remove it again!" said Corsoni's wife, hastily unfastening the fiery stone and concealing it in her bosom.

CHAPTER XIII.

TO THE DEVIL'S RETREAT.

Then Corsoni seized her hand and drew her into the yard, where the men already mounted awaited their chief.

Corsoni placed his wife on her horse and then mounted his own.

Alberta, turning around, saw Elfie bound hand and foot behind Goldsborough, who was firmly seated on one of the most powerful roadsters she had ever seen.

Elfie could no longer fight or struggle, but she scolded and remonstrated as vigorously as ever.

"Men—if you are men and not monsters—how dare you look on and see such an outrage as this accomplished!" she cried, addressing the band at large.

But the men were busy with their curbs, restraining restive horses, that were as eager to fly as their masters; and they had no attention to bestow on Elfie.

"Colonel Corsoni, are you a gentleman, and will you permit this violence to be done me?" she demanded of the Free Sword.

But the guerrilla chief was marshaling his band, and did not even hear her words.

"Alberta, Alberta, why do you not interfere? You promised that no wrong should be done me that you could prevent!" she screamed, turning her head—the only part of her person she could move—toward Madam Corsoni.

"Would to Heaven I could prevent this, Elfie!" exclaimed the guerrilla's wife. Then, turning to her cousin, she said, sharply:

"Albert Goldsborough, if you have a spark of manhood left, release the girl and leave her here. The Federals will find her when they come, and protect her, until they can send her to her friends."

"Ha, ha, ha! Quite right, Alberta," laughed Colonel Goldsborough. "As lady and chieftainess you could not say less. Though, of course, your interference was a

mere form; for you know as well as I do that Elfie would not thank you for hindering me; because at heart she is just as willing to be carried off as I am to take her."

"Oh, you—you—you unutterably, contemptible miscreant!" cried Elfie, at a loss for names base enough to bestow on her captor.

But at that instant the order was given to move forward; and Goldsborough put spurs to his horse and bounded away.

The troop started—very much as a company of fox hunters start when the fox has broken cover—all in wildest haste and disorder, the first object being to get away as quickly as possible—the great difference that in this case the party were the hunted instead of the hunters.

They galloped, without drawing rein, until they had put miles and miles between themselves and their late encampment.

Then, on the edge of another great forest, they slackened pace to breathe their horses.

When all the troop—the men and horses covered with dust and reeking with sweat—rode up, their chief lifted his hand and spoke to them:

"Attention! Scatter yourselves through the forest, and rendezvous to-night at the Black Bear's Pass, where we join Colonel Goldsborough's force."

Then they entered the forest by different paths, and scattered themselves according to order.

Some little distance into the forest Colonel Corsoni and Alberta rode side by side.

"So we go to Goldsborough's encampment," she said.

"Yes. This morning, when the scouts brought in the news that the enemy's cavalry, informed by the little spy Gill, was after us, we called a hasty council of war—Goldsborough, myself, Mutchison and Abershaw—when it was decided that we should consolidate the remnant of our bands at the Black Bear's Pass, there to wait for Monck, who is expected down from the Shenandoah Valley, to plan another raid into Pennsylvania or Maryland. Ah, what a hard life this for you, my tenderly-reared love!" said the guerrilla chief, suddenly breaking

off from his talk of rapine and bloodshed to gaze with ineffable tenderness upon his companion.

"My Free Sword," exclaimed his wife, fondly and proudly, "it is the life of my heart's choosing. I am happy—oh, believe me—I am always happy by your side! only miserable when absent from you. And you never wish me absent, do you, Vittorio?"

"God knows, never!" exclaimed the Free Sword, fervently. "I am such an egotist as to want you always with me, cost you what it may."

'Such an egotist' are you, in making me so happy? Listen, my chief—oh, my dearest, listen! I am orthodox and I believe in heaven and in hell. But I will have no heaven that you do not share, my own! And death and hell are less terrible to me than the thought of parting from you," she murmured, still fondly and proudly, as she had spoken before.

"Then by the splendor of Heaven we will never part again—no, not for a day!"

They continued their way through the forest, which grew thicker and darker as they penetrated deeper into its recesses. At length, however, they reached higher ground, where the trees grew thinner.

And just as the moon arose they began to ascend that almost inaccessible part of the mountains known as the Black Bear's Pass.

Steep, winding, difficult and dangerous was the way.

The side of the mountain up which the path wound was nearly perpendicular, broken into rocks, cut up with torrents and obstructed with a ragged, scrubby copsewood of evergreen. The precipice towered a thousand feet above them on their right hand, and fell a thousand feet below them on their left. A single false step must have precipitated horses and riders to death.

The pass became more and more steep, winding, difficult and dangerous. The rocks were more broken, the torrents more swollen, the copsewood more tangled and treacherous.

An hour more of toilsome and terrible climbing brought them to the top of the mountain.

The full moon was now at its zenith, and shone

brightly down upon a scene which was as great a curiosity in its way as the Natural Bridge itself. It seemed a fort of Nature's own forming. Saucer-shaped was the top of the mountain, and surrounded by a natural breastwork of earth and rocks, in the clefts of which grew sturdy evergreens. Within this naturally inclosed space, which was about a mile in circumference, was a picturesque spectacle—groups of men, droves of horses and many campfires. But here seemed no sign of shelter for man or beast.

Colonel Goldsborough had arrived before Corsoni and Alberta. He had unbound his captive, who was seated in sulky silence on the ground, and he now turned to receive the Free Sword.

"Welcome to the Devil's Retreat, for such is the delectable name by which this natural fortification goes. See, your men are here before you, and they are already preparing for the comfort of madam," he said.

Corsoni laughed and thanked his host, and then alighted and lifted his wife off her horse.

"You must be nearly dead with fatigue, beloved," he whispered, tenderly, as he took a blanket from one of his men, threw it to the ground, and gently seated Alberta on it.

Meanwhile some of Corsoni's band busied themselves with cutting down saplings, driving stakes into the ground, weaving walls, and roofing in a temporary shelter for Corsoni's beloved wife—beloved by all the band for her devotion to their chief and their cause.

"Come sit on this blanket with me, Elfie. You will take cold on the bare ground, child," said Alberta, kindly.

And the captive, who felt a sort of limited sense of safety in the presence of the chieftainess, came and sat down beside her.

When Alberta's pretty, picturesque hut of fragrant evergreens was finished Haddycraff came to her and said:

"Your shelter is ready, lady. Come into it. Abershaw will bring you tea."

Alberta thanked her faithful follower, and gave her hand to her female companion, saying:

"Come, Elfie, you shall share my hut, and rest under my protection to-night, as last night."

CHAPTER XIV.

COLONEL ROSENTHAL.

Now it happened that upon the very morning of Elfie's fatal picnic excursion, the colonel of Justin's regiment, being convalescent, returned to his post of duty. Major Rosenthal was relieved, and for faithful and efficient services was promoted to the rank of colonel, and ordered to assume the command of the —— Cavalry, then stationed at W., in the valley.

The next morning, Colonel Rosenthal, mounted on a noble war-horse, set forth to cross the Blue Ridge, *en route* for his distant destination. He was attended by a single orderly, the friendless youth whom Britomarte had kissed and blessed on the moving of the brigade, and who was thenceforth the object of Justin's especial care.

The valley was free, or supposed to be free, from guerrillas, and therefore a bodyguard was deemed unnecessary.

It was a glorious autumn morning after the storm, and the passage of the mountains on this route was neither difficult nor dangerous. And it was yet early in the forenoon when Colonel Rosenthal, having crossed the ridge in safety, descended into the old turnpike stage road, leading through a dense forest toward W., which was still far distant.

But the glory of the morning had no power to lighten the gloom that overshadowed the young officer's spirit.

In truth, he had both public and private matters for depression.

The former was, of course, grief for the widespread ruin wrought by the war, and sickness of soul with "hope deferred" by its long continuance and indefinitely postponed end, and was shared by every patriot in the land, and every philanthropist in the world.

The latter was in distress about his sister Erminie and his beloved Britomarte, and his intense anxiety con-

cerning the fate of a young orderly sergeant, whom, while in temporary command of the regiment, he had detailed on special duty, and who had left him about seven days previous to this, and had not yet been heard from.

This boy was an especial favorite with his superior officer. Soon after the regiment had left Washington, and while it was lying at City Point, he had enlisted. Since that, for cleanliness, sobriety, fidelity, and, in short, all soldierly good qualities, he had been steadily promoted until he had reached the rank of sergeant.

As by instinct Justin Rosenthal soon singled the boy out from his comrades, and selected him as one of his own orderlies, Hay being the other.

Now it occurred that while Major Rosenthal was in command of the regiment at H., there came rumors of the reappearance of the terrible Free Sword on the east side of the Blue Ridge. He was reported to be in the neighborhood of L., reorganizing his band of desperadoes, who were flocking to his standard by scores, by fifties and by hundreds.

It was whispered that there was a plan on foot to mass the three great bands respectively commanded by Monck, Corsoni and Goldsborough; then to cross the river above the Point of Rocks, slip down behind the line of forts, and make a sudden dash into Washington.

Such were the rumors among the country people; but whether they were true or false, or by whom, or upon what ground they had been started, no one could tell.

Reconnoitering parties had been sent to beat up the country in the neighborhood of L., but they had returned without having seen or heard anything about the dreaded Free Sword or any of his followers.

Either he was not there, or his encampment was well concealed, and the people of the country were keeping his secret.

And as for Monck's and Goldsborough's bands, there was not even a rumor suggestive of their whereabouts.

It became now advisable to send some person of equal tact and courage, who should go among the country people in the vicinity of L., pass for a secessionist, discover the retreat of the Free Sword, penetrate to his camp, and

find out what foundation there might be for all the rumors that were afloat.

The duty must be undertaken voluntarily, of course; no one in the regiment was found willing to go upon this dangerous expedition, until Will Wing, the major's second orderly, proffered his services for the forlorn hope.

His major was surprised and softened by this devotion in one so young and tender as this boy, and he kindly and candidly set before him the extreme perils of the enterprise.

But Wing was firm, and respectfully represented that his very youth would be his protection, as it would render him an object of less suspicion to the enemy; and he begged that he might be permitted to render the required service to his country.

So the major had consented, and the young orderly, disguised in a suit of Confederate gray, had left H. some seven days before, and since that he had not been seen or heard from.

And now Colonel Rosenthal's soul was pierced by remorse for having suffered the boy to go upon such a fatal errand, and by grief for his probable fate; for scarcely a doubt remained upon the colonel's mind that his spy had been discovered, and had fallen a victim to the vengeance of the terrible Free Sword.

With a spirit burdened and darkened by these thoughts and feelings, Colonel Rosenthal rode on his way.

So few travelers passed this old, deserted turnpike road, that the sound of horse's feet, galloping rapidly toward him, startled Justin and caused him to look up; when, to his unspeakable joy, he recognized Wing.

Smiling, the boy saluted his officer and sprang from his horse.

"Oh, Wing, my child! I am so rejoiced to see you safe back again! What news?" eagerly exclaimed Colonel Rosenthal.

"Great news, major," said Wing, who knew nothing of his officer's new rise in rank—"great news, sir. I have met with complete success. I have unearthed Corsoni and delivered him and his band to our forces."

"That is glorious! Wing, you shall have a lieutenant's commission for that!"

"Thanks, major; if the new commission is not to remove me from your side," said the orderly.

"Foolish boy! Do you weigh your attachment to me against such an honor as that?"

"No; Heaven knows I do not, for my attachment to you would so weigh down the honor that it would send the lieutenant's commission flying!"

"We shall not be separated, Wing. I shall take good care of that. I am going on to W. to take command of a cavalry regiment there. After you are promoted, if you should be found capable of fulfilling the duties of the office, you shall be my adjutant and live at my headquarters. But where were you flying so fast when I met you, Wing?"

"To report to you, colonel."

"At H.?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you have an opportunity of reporting here. Mount your horse, Wing, and ride on with me. I have managed to get you and Hay detached from your late regiment, and transferred to the one of which I am about to assume command; so that you may both be near me, as formerly."

"Thanks, colonel," answered Wing, springing lightly into his saddle.

"Now give me a full report of your expedition, Wing. Yet, let it be a brief one, since 'brevity is the soul of wit.'"

"It shall be brief as a military order, my colonel. When I left the camp, seven days since, with the rebel prisoner's clothes on my back and the rebel soldier's pass in my pocket, and your pass rolled up into the compass of a hazel-nut and wrapped in waterproof skin, tucked into my cheek like a quid of tobacco, so that I could even swallow it in a case of extreme emergency, I took the way to L., avoiding the highway and keeping pretty much to the country roads and bridle paths. I stopped at the farmhouses, ostensibly to procure food or lodging, but really to get information. I passed for a Confederate soldier on leave, going home to L. to see my friends; and to prove my words true, I showed them the pass that we

took from the prisoner William Gill, whom we captured near C."

"But, Wing, there was danger in that."

"Sir, there was danger in every step of the expedition. I was prepared to meet it."

"Brave boy! But suppose you had met with people who knew the person of this William Gill?"

"Sir, I had to risk that, and to use some little address. On coming to a farmhouse, at the close of the day, for instance, I would be taken at once by my uniform to be a Confederate soldier, and I would be received and treated kindly. Soon I would take an opportunity of asking my entertainers if they knew a family of the name of Gill. Almost invariably it happened that they knew no such family personally; though in some instances they knew of them. I would express myself sorry for that, as I was a connection of that family myself and had been in hopes of meeting friends on my road. When my entertainers betrayed suspicion of me, which was very seldom, I showed Gill's pass, which at once dissipated all their doubts."

"Well, and what did you hear from these people?"

"Plenty of abuse of the Yankees, colonel, which was quite natural, and in which I joined so boisterously and with such seeming malignity as sometimes even to provoke an opology for these same Yankees from their Confederate foes. 'Some of them Union fellows were not so very bad, after all,' the rebels admitted."

"Well, but about the Free Sword?" inquired Colonel Rosenthal.

"I heard nothing for the first two days. Near noon, on the second day of my journey, I fell in with a party of our foragers. I was stopped immediately as a rebel. But I took out my quid of waterproof skin, and unrolled and exhibited your pass, and told my story. I passed the night with them, and from them I learned that on the preceding night they had surrounded the house of a certain notorious bushwhacker named Gill, with orders to arrest him and his sons; that they had been fired upon from the windows of the house, and several of their number wounded and two killed; that they had then fired the house and burned out the bushwhackers.

The father and one son were killed in the fight that followed, and the other son was taken prisoner. There was another son, they said, who had been captured some six weeks before. I explained to the men that this first captured son was the one I was personating, and that the affair of the previous night would aid me very much in keeping up the character. In the morning I left them and went on my journey, striking deeper into the forest."

"I hope you soon struck the trail of the Free Sword."

"Sooner than I expected. Look you, sir: I did not spare my flesh and blood. I gashed myself with several wounds, to make it appear that I had been in a fight. Nor did I spare the Confederate uniform. I burned and scorched it in several places, to make it seem that I had barely escaped with my life from the burning homestead."

"You have a great deal of craft for one so young, Wing."

"'Necessity is the mother of invention,' it is said, sir. In this 'forlorn plight' I went on my way, until, near nightfall, I came to a lonely farmhouse, on the edge of the forest, where there were some extremely ragged Confederate soldiers, smoking and drinking. I dragged myself to their presence, and told them my piteous story: how I was a Confederate soldier on leave; how I was going home to see my father and brothers, when, on the very night of my arrival, their house was burned, and they themselves bayoneted by the Yankee soldiers; and how I barely escaped with my life."

"There again you ran a risk, Wing! Suppose these soldiers had personally known the Gills?"

"I provided for that, colonel. The first question I groaned forth was whether they knew the Gills. No—none of them knew the family personally, though one man said he had heard of them, and that they had a son in the Confederate army. So you see, my colonel, all the rest was easy enough. I had only to say that I was that son, and to tell them my piteous story."

"But suppose some one of their number had known the son by sight, and so had detected you?"

"Suppose the earth had opened under my feet, colonel? I beg your pardon for speaking so lightly, sir; but one

was as likely to happen as the other. Both were possible, but neither probable. However, I had even provided for the remote contingency of detection before committing myself in my story. I had ascertained by observation that no one among them knew by sight any member of the Gill family. If they had, I should have passed myself as a distant connection, bearing the same name."

"Go on, my boy."

"One of the men—Haddycraff—asked me how long I had to serve in the regiment to which I belonged. I answered no time at all. That my leave in point of fact amounted to a discharge, for that before the leave should expire, my time of service would be out."

"And what was your motive in telling that story, Gill? Was it that you had got your hand in, or rather your tongue in, to the invention line of business, and couldn't get it out again?" laughed Colonel Rosenthal.

"Not at all, sir; I had a motive in saying that. I saw that the men among whom I found myself were members of some guerrilla gang, and that they were after recruits. The event proved that I was quite right, for Sergeant Haddycraff, slapping me smartly upon the shoulder, exclaimed heartily:

"'Well, my brave boy, a soldier does not sit down to weep over his wrongs, like a woman; he rises up to avenge them like a man!'

"'And that I mean to do on every blamed Unionist I can find!' I answered.

"'Quite right. Now you're a-chatting. That's the talk! Now, to help you do this, how would you like to take service under one of our gallant independent leaders?' he asked.

"'One of the guerrilla chiefs, do you mean?' I inquired.

"'That's what the lying Yankees call us, blast them! We are no more guerrillas than we are Cossacks!' exclaimed Haddycraff, angrily.

"'But, for my part, I thank the Yankees for bestowing it. I should glory in the name of guerrilla,' I said.

"'Ha, ha, ha! We have made it a terror to the clock-peddling heroes who have mistaken their vocation and come down here to fight us,' chuckled Haddycraff.

"'To be a gallant guerrilla is the height of my ambition,' I said.

"'Then, how would you like service under the brave Free Sword?'

"'The Free Sword!' I exclaimed, with enthusiasm. 'Oh, Heaven! I should think it almost too much glory to hope for to live and die in the service of the great Free Sword!'

"'And I tell you what, my boy, your ardent admiration of Colonel Corsoni is shared by at least one-half of the youth in Virginia.'

"'But the cursed Yankees who burned my father's house were saying among themselves that the force of the Free Sword was entirely broken up and scattered to the four winds, and that it never could be reorganized,' I said.

"'Ho, ho, ho! And that is all they know about it,' laughed Haddycraff; 'and if you choose to go with me, and take service under the Free Sword, you may know for yourself how little truth there is in those reports.'

"Well, my colonel, I agreed to accompany the guerrillas to the camp of their chief. And so, when they had feasted at the expense of the farm people, who were mostly women and negroes, and had loaded their mules with farm produce, for which they paid in veritable greenbacks, we all took the road through the woods for some miles, and then turned out of the road in the thickest depths of the pathless forest, and with no other guide than a pocket compass, found on our way to the encampment of the Free Sword."

"And where was that?"

"On an old deserted plantation in a clearing of that same forest. The approaches to the encampment were very strongly picketed. There was strict military discipline observed. We reached headquarters just as they were beating the reveille, and in twenty minutes afterward I was ushered into the presence of the Free Sword. A very handsome fellow is this celebrated guerrilla chief, my colonel, looking every inch a brigand leader, however, and reminding one strongly of Fra Diavolo in the opera."

"Yes, yes—I know the personal appearance of Vittorio

Corsoni. I knew him well in former days. He was a young Italian adventurer, and at the first opportunity took to the guerrilla life as naturally as a duck to water. How were you received by him?"

"Very, very kindly. He bent those large, dark eyes so earnestly upon me while I was telling my piteous story of coming back to find a burning homestead and a murdered father, with his 'hoary head all dabbled with his blood,' that to escape his intense gaze I had to cover my face with my hands and take refuge behind a flood of tears. And then what do you think happened, colonel?"

"What?"

"I felt the hand of the Free Sword laid gently on my head—gently as a woman's hand—and I heard his voice saying:

"'You shall stay with me and be my son, and I will avenge you on your adversaries.' It was as if the voice of a Go of Olympus had spoken."

"Are you an enthusiast, Wing?" inquired Colonel Rosenthal.

"Perhaps, sir. Then, at least, when I looked up and saw tears of co passion standing in brave Corsoni's eyes —compassion for me, come to his camp to betray him, I felt for a moment as if I wer the caitiff and traitor, and he were the hero and patriot; and I assure you, my colonel, that I had to remember he was in arms against our Government before I could reconcile myself to the part I had to play."

"One might think you had fallen in love with the interesting brigand!"

"That would have been quite impossible for me, sir. Yet I do not wonder that his wife did! nor that she keeps close to his side through all the evils and dangers of his wild life!"

"You talk like a woman, Wing," exclaimed the colonel, laughing.

"Perhaps I do, sir; but I acted like a man! like a very man!" retorted Wing, sarcastically; "for I betrayed the host of whom I pretended to seek refuge, and who promised to protect me and avenge my supposed injuries!"

"And now you talk like one particular woman whom I

could name! But proceed, my boy! How did you get on in the camp of the Free Sword?"

"Very successfully! He said that I was not stout enough for their hard, military duty, so he placed me in attendance upon his wife. But I had ample opportunities of finding out their plans; for the Free Sword had no secrets from the devoted companion of his dangers. I learned, little by little, that there was certainly a plan on foot to consolidate the three great guerrilla bands, to make a raid into Pennsylvania or Maryland; they had not decided which was to be the theatre of the invasion. They were waiting for the arrival of Colonel Goldsborough, who was daily expected."

"Go on."

"Well, sir, I remained in the camp of the Free Sword for five days; but I learned nothing more, because there was really nothing more to learn. But on the evening of the fifth day there was a surprise."

"Ah!"

"Not from our forces. The surprise was the sudden arrival of Colonel Goldsborough with a female captive. He came in the dead of night, with his prisoner bound on the horse behind him, and attended by a single officer, the nortorious Nicholas Mutchison, whose gigantic proportions have in no degree been exaggerated by report."

"Umph!"

"We learned from the loud-mouthed Mutchison, who told the story with great gusto, that their band had surprised a picnic party near the Point of Rocks; had exchanged their own foul and ragged clothing for the holiday dresses of the gentlemen, as far as they would go; had eaten up the picnic dinner and finished the evening by a ball in which they danced with the ladies of the party; and finally had broken up their bivouac in a hurry at the arrival of their chief and the announcement of a squadron of Yankee cavalry near, and had brought off one young lady captive, leaving all the others to find their way home as they could."

"Where was this picnic party from?"

"Washington."

"And—what young lady was that who was taken

captive?" inquired Colonel Rosenthal, with a dawning of anxiety.

"Mutchison called her Miss Fielding; Colonel Goldsborough called her Elfie."

"Good Heaven!"

"What is the matter, sir?"

"I know the young lady. She is an old friend of my sister. Go on, Wing."

"Well, sir, the young lady was placed under the care of Madam Corsoni, who made her comfortable—that is, as comfortable as any creature whose every breath was a malediction could be made."

"The young lady did not bear her captivity very patiently, then?"

"Patiently! I tell you, my colonel, if I had been Albert Goldsborough I had rather carried off bodily a well-grown she tiger. She had torn his hair and whiskers out by the roots and had nearly clawed both his ears off. His jaws will have to be bandaged for a month; and if he doesn't get erysipelas from his wounds, I don't know what will prevent him. Afterward, while she was in the care of Madam Corsoni, as I said before, she did nothing but breathe maledictions against him and his band."

"Very natural and extremely like her. Well, my boy, you say that was on the evening of the fifth day; you must have left soon after that."

"Yes, sir, I did. That night the Free Sword, much to his distaste, had to give up his half of his lady's chamber to her new guest; for, as Madam Corsoni was the only other woman in the encampment, she insisted on keeping the young girl under her own immediate protection."

"And she was quite right. Proceed, Wing."

"'That night the Free Sword, being banished from his wife's quarters, passed the hours with his guest, Colonel Goldsborough, in consultation upon the combination of their forces for the projected raid. I kept the door. In that interview it was decided that the three great bands respectively commanded by Colonel Corsoni, Goldsborough and Monck, should rendezvous at the Black Bear's Pass, where the greater portion of Goldsborough's guer-

rillas had already preceded them, and where Monck's horde was expected to join them. It was arranged that they should march the next day, if the weather should permit."

"Well! Go on."

"When I had heard so much, my colonel, I thought it was about time for me to make my escape from the Free Sword's camp and carry the information to the nearest Federal Fort. Soon as I was relieved from duty at the office door, I took measures to get off unobserved. Fortunately for me, a terrible storm arose. Under its cover I made my escape."

"How did you pass their pickets, my boy?"

"I crawled through the dense and pathless woods between the picket stations, until I got quite clear of the encampment. Fate still favored me. Outside I caught a horse all saddled and bridled, that seemed to have broken away from his fastenings somewhere. Once mounted on the horse, I dashed on as fast as possible toward Fort R., where I arrived just before sunrise. I was stopped and questioned by our own pickets. I had no pass-word, of course; but I told my story and was taken under guard up to headquarters, where again to Colonel D. I told my story. And in fifteen minutes or less time, two companies of cavalry were mounted and off after the Free Sword. I was detailed in a sort of honorable captivity for several hours, and finally dismissed with a pass to return to my regiment at H."

"Before leaving Fort R. did you hear from the companies that went out after Corsoni?"

"Yes, sir; some of the men returned to report to Colonel W. that my information was correct; that they had found the camp of the Free Sword just where I had reported it to be; but that the band had probably received information of the approach of our forces, for that they had hastily evacuated the premises."

"Then Corsoni and his band were not captured?"

"No, sir; but the cavalry were still in search of them when I left."

As they spoke, they emerged from the forest out upon the broad high road that skirted it.

"We are now about thirty miles from W., I think, Wing," said the colonel.

"Thirty-eight," answered the boy.

"So far? Well, at least we shall reach the town by nightfall," concluded the colonel.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MEETING.

And they turned to the right, and rode along the edge of the forest for some four or five miles, when they saw approaching them from the opposite direction a body of horsemen.

"That must be a detachment of our cavalry, Wing. What do you think?"

"I think it is, sir. But I can't be sure yet. The clouds of dust prevent my seeing them clearly," answered the boy.

"And then they are so far off. Let me see," said the colonel, taking out his field-glass and "sighting" the approaching party.

"I am nearly sure they are our men, sir," said Hay, speaking for the first time.

"Yes, it is a detachment of the cavalry now stationed at W. What is afoot, I wonder?" exclaimed the colonel putting spurs to his horse and galloping forward to meet the advancing party.

The officer in command of the squadron rode out to receive him.

The two met like old friends.

"Ho! Colonel Rosenthal! Happy to see you. Heard of your promotion this morning. Allow me to congratulate—no, not you, but—the regiment, on the acquisition of so brave a soldier and able an officer. I wish my company belonged to your regiment," said the cavalry officer.

"Thanks, Major O'Neale. But—what's out?"

"What's out? The guerrillas. They are swarming into this neighborhood like seven-year locusts. Goldsborough's guerrillas have made a raid upon a party of excursionists near the Point of Rocks, and robbed them

of everything, even to the clothes they stood up in—even to their sacred linen?"

"Yes, I heard of that. A squadron of cavalry from Fort W. is out after them, but they are encamped somewhere near the Black Bear's Pass, far enough from here," said Colonel Rosenthal.

"Ah! is that so? Then there is no chance of falling in with them hereabouts?"

"None in the world."

"And the Free Sword has reappeared!"

"He has joined issue with Goldsborough, and their forces are united."

"Are you certain of that?"

"I am quite certain of that, and I am half suspicious that you are out on a wildgoose chase if you are after guerrillas," laughed Colonel Rosenthal.

"Not quite so fast. You have accounted satisfactorily for the Free Sword and for Goldsborough. But here is Monck suddenly sprung up with all his band from Heaven knows where. And they are ravaging the country right and left. It is after Monck especially, and not after the other two, that we are sent out," said Major O'Neale.

"Monck, I think, will be found somewhere in the neighborhood of the Black Bear's Pass, where he is expected to combine with Goldsborough and Corsoni for a new raid on an extensive scale. Thanks to the courage and discretion of my young orderly here, whom I sent as a spy into the camp of the Free Sword, I am in possession of all their plans, which I intend to reveal to General W. as soon as I get into the town."

Major O'Neale deigned to turn his eyes for a moment upon the young orderly whom Colonel Rosenthal had praised; but the question of the guerrillas was of too absorbing interest to admit of a moment's wandering from the subject, and so he replied:

"Your information, obtained by so much courage and tact, and at so great a risk, may be very correct. I have no doubt that Corsoni and Goldsborough may both be at the Black Bear's Pass, and that Monck may be on his way to join them; but, in the meantime, it is certain that he is ravaging the country about here. I suppose a score

of fugitives have rushed into W. within the last twelve hours with tales of Monck's burnings and wastings."

"Then there can be no mistake about his near neighborhood."

"None in the world. But the question is, where did his band spring from? One would think that they had sprung full grown and equipped, out of the ground, like the myrmidons of classic story."

"These vast forests afford too good a cover for these bandits. They should all be leveled," said Colonel Rosenthal.

"But what a herculean labor. And think how many of them have been leveled—— But you, colonel, you are going on to W.?"

"Of course."

"And with only these two orderlies by way of a body guard——"

"Just as you see."

"I strongly advise you not to do so. The road is certainly very unsafe," said Major O'Neale.

"I am ordered to proceed to W. immediately to take command of my regiment, and I must go on," said Colonel Rosenthal, decisively.

And so the friends parted—each going opposite ways—Major O'Neale and his command toward the ridge, and Colonel Rosenthal and his orderlies toward W.

The colonel with his attendants rode on a mile or two, and then, as the sun was sinking to its setting, they entered an arm of the forest.

"After all, I doubt whether we shall reach W. before dark. We must be still twenty-five miles off," remarked Colonel Rosenthal.

"Sir, we are thirty," answered Wing.

"These Virginia miles are certainly the longest I ever traveled," laughed Colonel Rosenthal.

They went on, their path becoming narrower and more obstructed as they penetrated farther and farther into the depths of the forest. Sunset faded into twilight and twilight deepened into night.

After passing through a fordable stream that crossed their path Wing rode up alongside Colonel Rosenthal and said, cheerfully:

"We are not more than twenty miles from W. now, sir."

"Twenty Virginia miles, Wing, which means twenty-five of any other sort," replied the colonel.

"Hist! what is that?" cried Wing, in a low, breathless voice.

"What?" inquired the colonel, drawing rein.

"Where?" questioned Hay, riding up.

"That glittering object on the left hand of the road!" exclaimed Wing.

And they all looked and saw—not only one bayonet, but twenty or thirty, projecting from the thicket each side of the road, and gleaming faintly in the starlight.

"It is the guerrilla band. Retreat!" cried Colonel Rosenthal, raising his hand and turning his horse's head. His two followers also turned.

But their road in the rear was bristling each side with bayonets. Retreat was cut off.

"Dash forward, then!" exclaimed Colonel Rosenthal, drawing his sword, wheeling, and putting spurs to his horse.

"Halt, you cursed Yankees!" yelled a guerrilla, leaping into the middle of the road, followed by all his band, who closed in upon the three travelers, surrounding them with a fence of fixed bayonets.

Of course the travelers had no other alternative than to halt.

"Surrender, blast you!" thundered the same voice that had ordered the halt.

"Bring your leader here, or conduct us to his presence," said Colonel Rosenthal, sternly.

The guerrilla replied by a volley of oaths which were, however, interrupted by another member of the band, who came suddenly upon the scene, and "spoke as one having authority."

"Crowfield, what is the meaning of this?"

"It is this blasted Yankee prisoner, who won't give up his sword until I tear it from his beastly hands. Demands to be taken before Major Monck, or to have Major Monck brought to him—devil burn him!" answered the savage.

"Crowfield, you are wrong. This is Colonel Rosen-

thal, and Major Monck's orders were strict, that when he should be taken, he should be treated with courtesy, and conducted at once to his headquarters."

"Oh, yes! that's the way with the major! He'll take a prisoner, feast a prisoner, and then hang a prisoner; but all in courtesy! Oh, yes! whatever the major does is always done in courtesy. As for me, I'd rather blast a Yankee and let him go, than bless him and hang him, as our major does. You'll find worse fellows in the world than I am, if you wouldn't give me up your sword, Colonel Prisoner," said the guerrilla, nodding to Colonel Rosenthal.

"Sergeant Crowfield, you are drunk! and I'll give you until four o'clock to-morrow morning to get sober in!"

"Captain Bannister, you're a heap drunker'n I am, and so I'll give you until four o'clock to-morrow afternoon to get sober in!"

"You are under arrest, sir. Blake! take his musket and look after him," said the angry officer.

When these orders were obeyed, Captain Bannister turned to the prisoner and said:

"Colonel Rosenthal, we will take you to Major Monck's headquarters that are only about three miles from this spot."

Colonel Rosenthal bowed gravely and silently.

The guerrilla captain then placed a guard around the prisoners, and marshaled his band, and gave the order to march.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GUERRILLA'S ENCAMPMENT.

After marching on through the forest in a tedious manner for nearly forty minutes, they came suddenly upon a picket guard.

All in the darkness, the arriving band was challenged with the usual:

"Who goes there?"

Captain Bannister answered and gave the password, and then exclaimed:

"You are as dark as the Stygian lake here, Griffin!

What the d—— do you mean by it? I had nearly ridden over you."

"The orders were to show no lights, captain."

"Humph! What is the news, Griffin?"

"Wiley has captured a sutler's wagon with a lot of liquor and provisions, captain. The major will feast you all to-night and give the men double rations, and to-morrow we are to have double rations of food and grog also."

"That is good news indeed, Griffin, to men who have been on short commons as long as we have."

"Hope you've had success, captain. So dark I can't see who is with you, sir."

"Yes, we have secured the rich prize we went to seek. Good-night, Griffin," said Bannister, passing on his way, followed by all his band.

The approach to Monck's camp was very strongly picketed; they passed several other guards, but all concealed in thick wood and deep darkness, out of which they watched and listened like crouching tigers for their prey.

At length the band emerged from the forest and came upon the deep and narrow river, beyond which arose a nearly perpendicular range of mountains, dimly seen in the starlight.

Here the officer in command of the party halted and took a whistle from his pocket and blew a shrill blast.

It was answered from the other side; and almost immediately the splash of oars was heard, and a ferryboat was seen to move across the water.

It was little better than a scow; but it accommodated the three prisoners with their immediate guard.

While they were crossing the captain questioned the ferryman:

"What news in the camp, Horne?"

"Well, sir, Sergeant Wiley and about thirty of the men surprised a sutler's wagon that was a straggling behind its train, and captured it, with three prisoners and a quantity of stores. All the men but the pickets had double rations. The major wouldn't give them double because he wanted them to be very sharp to-night; but to-

morrow they are to have double grog as well as double rations."

"Yes—I heard about that. Anything else?"

"Well, sir, Captain Miller has gone out with his company to waylay a train of army wagons as our scouts report to be crossing the valley, on their way to W.; but he is not expected back to-night."

"I am sorry to hear that. I think it was a bad move. The valley is all up, bristling with Yankee rifles. A little devil of a spy got into the camp of the Free Sword, and afterward ran away and betrayed his retreat to the Yankees. He had to evacuate his camp in great haste."

"What a blasted bit of bad luck!" exclaimed the ferryman.

"Yes; and that is not all. Goldsborough—well, he's not the first great soldier that ever lost the world for a woman—Goldsborough, instigated by the demon, made a dash across the river below the Point of Rocks and surprised a picnic party for no other purpose than to carry off a certain girl."

"What a blamed fool—begging your pardon, captain!"

"Yes, he was all that. And, the result of all this is, that there are no less than three companies of cavalry out in search of us in different directions. The chances are that Miller will meet with some of them."

As Captain Bannister spoke the boat grated upon the sands of the shore, and the party prepared to land.

The captain walked his horse out first, and was followed by the others of the party in the same manner.

Leaving the ferryman to go back after the remainder of the band, Captain Bannister led his party by a steep, narrow and winding path up the mountain side, passing many picket guards, by whom they were challenged, and to whom he gave the countersign.

As they reached the summit, the moon, large, round, and red as a ball of fire, was rising behind a dark, green cedar wood in the valley before them.

"There are the headquarters of Major Monck," said the captain to his prisoner, pointing down into the thickly wooded valley.

He then led the way down this side of the mountain by a path as steep, narrow and winding as that by which they

had ascended on the other side, and they met as many pickets as before.

Arrived at the foot of the precipice, the captain led the way into the cedar thicket, "where path there was none;" but by some occult method of his own, or some signs unintelligible to the uninitiated, he took his party on until they came to a low worm-fence surrounding a clearing in the very center of the woods.

At regular intervals of space sentinels marched to and fro before this fence.

One of them challenged Captain Bannister, who gave the countersign, and immediately passed with his party through the gate.

Within the rude inclosure, which seemed to have been an old field, there was a busy, picturesque, enlivening scene.

Camp fires were scattered all over the area, and around them were grouped the men—some cooking their rations; some eating their suppers; some drinking whisky; smoking pipes and playing cards, and some lying flat upon their stomachs, with their limbs extended, their elbows resting on the ground, and their heads bowed upon their hands, while, by the light of the blazing pine knots, they studied the pictorial papers which were a part of the plunder that had been taken from the captured sutler's wagon.

Through this crowd the captain conducted his party toward an old, common-looking and rather dilapidated farmhouse that stood among its outbuildings at the farther end of the area. Beyond these buildings groups of cows and horses might be dimly seen.

The whole place was a combination of a ruined farm and a military encampment.

The house itself, on nearer approach, was seen to be a large, rude wooden building of one story, with a very steep roof, and with a rough piazza running the whole length of the front. One large door, with a window on each side, opened upon this. Here also were groups of men lounging on the steps and in the corners, while before the door a sentinel stood guard.

Captain Bannister dismounted, and signed to his pris-

oners to do the same. Then he called a man to take the horses, and beckoned the prisoners to follow him.

He led them by the front door into a large passage running through to the back of the house, and from which other doors opened leading into rooms on the right and left.

This passage was dimly lighted by a tallow candle, stuck into a tin sconce nailed against the wall.

Several soldiers were lounging here, and three or four were guarding a small group of prisoners at the farther end of the place.

A sentinel stood before the second door on the left hand.

"Remain here with your attendants, if you please, colonel, while I go in and make my report to my major," said Captain Bannister, politely addressing his captive.

Then turning to some of the lounging soldiers, he called them to come and guard these prisoners.

Four of the men approached at his bidding, and gathered around Colonel Rosenthal and his young orderlies.

Meanwhile the captain entered the second door on the left, which was guarded by a sentinel, and which was probably the office of the guerrilla chief.

Colonel Rosenthal, left with his party, looked around upon the contracted scene, noticed the dilapidated walls, and uneven floor, the rickety doors of the hall, and the ragged, wretched, famished aspect of its guerrilla occupants.

Then he turned his eyes toward the extreme back of the place, where, in a dark corner, were the three other prisoners, with their guard about them.

Two of these prisoners were men, and they were standing up, and even in this obscure light, Colonel Rosenthal thought he could recognize something familiar in the aspect of the taller of these men.

The third prisoner was a woman, and was seated on the ground with her apron thrown over her head.

While Justin was still looking at the group, and trying to remember who the tall man might be, the latter stooped and whispered to the woman, who then suddenly threw her apron down and turned her head.

Justin was standing where the faint light of the candle

in the sconce fell upon him, and, though he could not distinctly see the other prisoners in their obscure corner, they could see him quite plainly.

So, the instant after the woman had turned her head toward him, she leaped up and sprang past her guards before they could prevent her, and almost threw herself into Justin's arms, exclaiming frantically:

"Och, glory be to the Lord! is it yourself, Mr. Rosenthal, dear? And how is Miss Conyers, sure?"

"Judith!" cried Justin, in unbounded astonishment.

"Och, yis; it's meself, sure, Lorrd kape me!"

"I am glad and sorry to see you, my girl. How came you here?" inquired Justin.

"And is it how came I here? Sure didn't thim bastes iv gorrillas—divil burn thim, for they're worse nor the pirates thimselves—didn't they saize our wagon, and rob us iv every blessed thing we possessed in the world, and thin bring us here? That the Lorrd may smite thim!" exclaimed Judith, fervently.

"But, Judith, my girl, how did you happen to be among the sutlers?" inquired Justin.

"D'ye see me gay Tom there, with his head bound up? He is always getting his crown cracked, is me gay Tom. If he hadn't a hard Scotch head, he'd been dead long ago. D'ye see him, mind?"

"Yes," replied Justin, now turning to look again at the tall man, and recognizing McAlpine.

"Well, sure, me gay Tom, bad luck to his Scotch greediness for money, must turn sutler so he must. And so that was the way I came to be among them; for ye didn't think I was going to lave him to his own devices so far as to let him go alone, did ye?"

"I didn't know," laughed Justin; "but how came you to be captured?"

"Sure the divil got into the horses, and we couldn't make them go along, and keep up with the train; and we fell behind! That was how it was, let alone the fact that if there is any sort iv a misfortune at all at all, going round, meself is always sure to fall into it! Sure and wasn't I shipwrecked, and left for dead on a baste iv an island? And didn't I meet with thim haythen iv pirates, and get into a say fight? And don't it follow in coorse

that whin I took to the sutling line iv business I should fall among thaives? Sure it's me luck—Tom! bad manners to ye! why don't ye come and spake to the gentleman?" inquired Judith, suddenly breaking off from her discourse, and addressing her husband.

McAlpine, nodding and growling something in reply, made a step forward to comply with this suggestion. But the guard who had permitted the woman to talk to the new prisoner, would on no account allow the man to do so, and Judith's gay Tom had to keep his place.

CHAPTER XVII.

A COLD-BLOODED SENTENCE.

At this moment Captain Bannister came out of Monck's room, and addressing his prisoner, said:

"Major Monck is not prepared to see you this evening. You will be in my charge for the night, and I will try to make your captivity as agreeable as may be consistent with my duty and your safety."

At noon on the following day Colonel Rosenthal was conducted by his good-natured jailer, Captain Bannister, into the presence of Major Monck.

The apartment occupied by Monck was furnished rudely as an office or sitting-room, with rough-hewn tables, chairs, stands and shelves. The floor, walls and windows were bare, but there was a fine fire of pine wood blazing in the chimney, and diffusing an air of cheerfulness even over this dreary scene.

Four or five soldiers lounged about the room, standing before the fire or gazing out of the windows.

A large, square deal table stood in the middle of the floor. Seated at it, and gazing at a map spread out before him, was the guerrilla, Monck. This notorious leader, hated even by his own men, needs here a particular description. In the first place, he did not look the least like the popular idea of a guerrilla, or even of a soldier. He looked far more like a rogue and a hypocrite.

He was a very large, fat, fair man, with a round head, covered with short-cropped flaxen hair, a big white face,

pale gray eyes, and full, sensual lips. He was dressed in a loose fitting suit of Confederate gray. And his broad-brimmed, soft felt hat lay on the table before him. If he had been really intoxicated the night before, there was little in his lymphatic appearance to betray the fact now.

At length Monck looked up from his map, but he turned his heavy white face toward Colonel Rosenthal, and stared with his big blue eyes straight through that gentleman's head as if it had not stood in his line of vision. Monck was evdently in a maze, being still bewildered with his geographical puzzles.

With a courteous bow and wave of his hand toward his companion, Captain Bannister motioned him up to the guerrilla chief and presented him.

"Colonel Rosenthal, of the —— Cavalry, Major Monck."

"Colonel Rosenthal, I am very glad to see you—very glad indeed! I can say these words with more truth than they are usually said. Indeed I was so desirous of entertaining you, that hearing you were on your way to W., attended by a single orderly, I sent out a special detachment of my best men to meet and escort you here. Again I say I am delighted to make your acquaintance. How are you, sir?" said Monck, with a sort of cold jocularity, extending his fat hand to his prisoner.

But Colonel Rosenthal ignored the hand and retreating a step, bowed coldly.

"Take a seat, sir—take a seat. Make yourself at home. We hope to enjoy the pleasure of your company for a good long while. We shall hold you in a sort of honorable captivity, as a hostage for the safety of some of our poor fellows now pining in the clock peddlers' prisons. Sit down, sir. Pray sit down. But let us find a chair first. Here, you, Hoskins! bring a chair this way for the gentleman. I hope we shall spend a pleasant season together, Colonel Rosenthal."

One of the men brought forward a rude wooden chair, probably of camp manufacture, and Justin threw himself into it.

Monck squared himself for a talk. Placing his big hands upon his fat knees, and staring blankly straight

before him, as seemed his senseless habit, he began by saying:

"I hope, sir, you found your quarters agreeable."

"I believe, sir, Captain Bannister did his best to make them so," answered Justin, coldly.

"That was right. By the way, Captain Bannister, you can retire," said Monck, turning toward his officer, who immediately left the room.

"And your rations, sir? How are they?" inquired Monck, squaring toward his prisoner again.

"I found no fault with them."

"That is well. Nor, to tell the honest truth, do I think that you had any reason to do so. We have a plenty of provender just now. The capture of that sutler's wagon was a great stroke of good fortune. It came in the nick of time, when we were expecting distinguished company, you see—ho! ho! ho! Well, I am glad you find yourself so comfortable, colonel."

Again Justin bowed gravely.

"So Grant is to have the command of the Army of the Potomac!" said Monck, suddenly.

"I have heard nothing to that effect, Major Monck," replied Justin, coldly.

"That's strange! And we knew all about it."

Justin made no reply.

"And General W. is in the Valley again?" said the guerrilla, interrogatively.

"Major Monck, you must be aware that I cannot converse with you upon military affairs," said Justin.

"Humph! not even upon subjects the details of which are as familiar to us as they are to your Cabinet at Washington, or to your general officers in council! Bless you, man, we have our friends in your Cabinet, in your Congress, in your councils—and even in your very detective police force! Ha, ha, ha! ho, ho, ho! Why, man, we know the contents of the sealed orders with which your ships-of-war sail, long before the commanders who hold them have broken them open! We knew where Banks was going, though all the loyal people of the United States, and all the naval and military officers, were in a frenzy of curiosity and wonder as to the meaning of the expedition!"

"I know nothing of your means of information, Major Monck; but I do know that I cannot converse with you on the subject."

"Quite right! I beg your pardon! Let us talk of something else. Try one of these cigars, colonel."

"Thanks—no. I seldom smoke in the morning," answered Justin, coldly.

"Here, Pearson, bring that parcel of newspapers that we took from the sutler's wagon," called Monck.

A soldier advanced from a remote part of the room, bringing in his arms a large bundle of papers, which he laid upon the table.

"Colonel Rosenthal, here are Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington papers. None of them are over two days old, and therefore as likely to be new to you as they were to me. Pray take them, and amuse yourself while I try to study out this cursed course on the map. You will remain here and dine with me today. And you will make yourself at home in the house, and within the limits of the camp consider yourself at liberty."

Justin bowed, took up the parcel of papers, and withdrew to an unoccupied window seat to look over them.

And Monck resumed the study of his map, probably trying to make out the shortest and safest route to the rendezvous at the Black Bear's Pass.

So several hours went by quietly enough.

Monck remained seated at the table, tracing lines on his map and making memoranda on his paper, or receiving reports and giving instructions to the officers and men who were continually coming and going.

Colonel Rosenthal remained in the window seat, occupied with his newspapers.

At length, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Monck impatiently arose from the table, and sweeping his maps and papers into a heap called to one of his men:

"Put all these things out of my sight. The more I puzzle myself over them, the more I addle my brains. And tell them to serve dinner immediately. The colonel will dine with me."

The dinner was very protracted. The major, and of course his prisoner guest, lingered long over the first

course, longer still over the second, the longest over the third; so that it was after six o'clock, and growing dark, when Monck called out to his attendants:

"Clear the table now; and bring us lights, and more brandy, and pipes, and tobacco. We'll make a night of it! And here! throw some more logs on to the fire. Let us have a roaring blaze!"

An hour went by, during which the blazing wood fire roared and crackled in the chimney, lighting up the whole room in which Monck and his prisoner sat at table —Monck smoking and drinking, his prisoner smoking and thinking.

Occasionally, as through the day, officers and men came to make reports and receive instructions and went away to execute orders. These were the only interruptions, and they were very brief ones. And at length these also ceased. The tattoo was beat, the guards set, and the camp subsided to repose, and the guerrilla chief and his guest were left in peace.

But not for any long time. Another hour was passing slowly by, when the stillness was broken by an unusual noise without.

Monck took the pipe from his mouth, and turned his head to listen.

The noise increased and became uproarious. A great clatter of horses' hoofs, as from a large body of cavalry dashing into the camp, mingled with loud cries, oaths and curses, and a confusion of strange sounds, filled the air, and nearly deafened and bewildered those who tried to listen and understand.

"I'm blasted if I don't think the Yankees have surprised the camp!" exclaimed Monck, starting to his feet to run out.

At the door he paused and turned suddenly to Justin, and saying:

"Remember your parole and stay where you are." And then he rushed through the door, banging it after him.

Left to himself Justin listened anxiously to the sounds without. Had the Union cavalry gained clew to Monck's retreat and surprised his camp? He earnestly hoped that it might be so, and he closed his eyes and strained his ears to hear. And the noise continued in all its chaos

and sounds, but it told him nothing definitely. And no one came into the room of whom he might make inquiries, for in the excitement of the hour every man was on the scene of action outside. And he himself was bound by his parole to remain where he was.

As he listened in keen anxiety and heavy suspense, he thought that the noise without was certainly not that of an engagement. There was no firing of shots, no ringing of steel, no sound of battle whatever. Only the prancing of horses and the yelling of men. Certainly if the confusion was caused by the onslaught of the Union cavalry, the guerrillas must have yielded without a blow. And that was scarcely a supposable case either with men of their fierce nature and reckless courage.

Still as he listened the noise began to subside; the horses ceased to prance, the men to yell. And then it occurred to Justin that all this excitement might have been kindled by the return of Monck's own foragers from their late raid. Nothing more likely, he decided.

At length, when perhaps half an hour had passed, and quiet seemed to have been restored without, Major Monck re-entered the room and resumed his seat at the table.

"May one inquire what all the noise was about?" questioned Justin.

"Oh, nothing at all but what we are used to," replied Monck, who was in the act of drawing the cork from one of the brandy bottles. When he had done so, he poured out a large glass of brandy and pushed it toward his guest, and said:

"You have drunk nothing, neither wine nor liquor, today. Oblige me by trying this fine old Otard."

"Thanks, no. I would rather not," answered Justin.

"Are you a member of the Total Abstinence Society, then?"

"Oh, no! I take a little brandy now and then, when I really need it," replied Justin.

"You need it now, or you will need it before many minutes are over your head. I beg that you will drink," insisted Monck without a smile on his face.

"Oh, well, if you make so strong a point of it. I am

under no pledge," replied Justin, laughing again as he raised the glass to his lips.

"That is right. It will brace you up," said Monck. And with that he filled a large tumbler with brandy for himself and tossed it off, and then another and another. until the bottle was empty.

The quantity of brandy that would have intoxicated almost any other man only steadied him. To use a common phrase, he was himself again—the same cold, cruel, sensual monster, who would order a poor wretch hung up by the neck to a tree before his tent, and have the door left open, so that while eating his breakfast he might enjoy the dying agonies of the victim. In a word, he was the same man that he was reported, but that Justin had never really believed him to be.

"Take a cigar, colonel. I see that Hoskins has brought us a really good lot. Bless that Scotch sutler! Try this one. The sedative effects of good tobacco upon a man's nerves is really incomparable," said Monck, handing what he considered a choice cigar to Colonel Rosenthal, and then selecting and lighting one for himself.

They puffed away in silence for a while, and then Monck, removing his "weed" to knock the ashes off, looked intently upon the face of his companion and inquired:

"How do you feel, Colonel Rosenthal?"

"Quite well, thank you," answered Justin, raising his eyebrows in surprise.

"That's right! Pretty strongly braced up, eh?"

"Quite so!"

"Glad to know it. Able to hear a pretty severe shock?"

"I do not know. What do you mean?" exclaimed Justin, uneasily.

"Because I shall have to give you a devil of a shock presently."

"In the name of Heaven what has happened? Have you any ill news of my friends?" anxiously inquired Colonel Rosenthal.

"No," said Monck, coolly replacing the cigar in his mouth and drawing the end of it into a bright coal.

"No; no ill news of your friends! ill news for your friends, however?"

"What do you mean, Major Monck?"

"Colonel Rosenthal, you are a brave man?" said Monck, semi-interrogatively.

"My friends think so."

"And your foes know so."

Justin bowed his head in acknowledgment of this compliment.

"Well, Colonel Rosenthal, as a brave man, you have no fear of death," said Monck, coolly throwing away his stump of cigar and lighting another.

"No! Tell me what you mean by this strange discourse."

"Well, if you insist upon it, I will. Besides, it is really time to tell you. But light your cigar first. We can smoke while we talk. Well, then, I mean that I shall have to hang you in about an hour from this."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WHISPER.

"Yes, Colonel Rosenthal, I shall have to hang you in about an hour from this."

Having pronounced this dreadful sentence in the coolest manner, Monck tossed off his tumbler of brandy, and then looked up to see what effect the words had had upon his intended victim.

Colonel Rosenthal's countenance was not changed in the slightest degree. He was still sitting back in his chair, contemplating Monck with that expression of mingled curiosity and perplexity with which he had hitherto listened to the guerrilla chieftain's strange discourse.

It was now Monck's turn to stare with astonishment at his prisoner.

"Well, I'm dashed! if ever I saw a fellow receive a sentence of death so coolly in all my life! Thunder, man, did you hear what I said to you? I have just told you that I shall have to hang you in about an hour!" exclaimed the chieftain.

"I heard you, Major Monck," coldly and haughtily replied the captive.

"You did, eh? Well, upon my word, you take things coolly for a young one. What do you think of it? What have you got to say?"

"Certainly I cannot think you speak seriously, Major Monck, and I must say that your jest is a very coarse and brutal one, not even to be excused upon the plea of intoxication," said Colonel Rosenthal, in strong disgust.

"Jest! Heaven and earth, man! can't you see that this is no jest! Here you are within——" Monck referred to his watch and then continued, "within fifty minutes of your execution, and you persist in calling it a jest!"

Justin Rosenthal was assuredly a brave man. He had frequently faced death fearlessly even in its most fearful forms. But now, as a conviction of Monck's real meaning forced itself upon his soul, he shuddered in spite of himself and grew a shade paler.

"Major Monck," he said, gravely, "you will not dare to carry out your design! You will not dare to commit this cold-blooded murder!"

"I should like to know what it is that I would not dare to do! But this is no cold-blooded murder, Colonel Rosenthal. For reasons that appear good to me I condemn a prisoner to death and order his execution. A dashed disagreeable duty—especially when it has to be done upon a man one has been dining with. I had no thought of winding up our social evening in this way. But you heard the row outside?"

"I heard it," curtly replied Justin.

"Well, it was about you."

"Me!"

"Yes. You see a party of my poor fellows went out yesterday to intercept some Yankee commissary stores that were on their way across the valley. But my poor boys were themselves intercepted by a squadron of Yankee cavalry that came from W. to look after them. There was an engagement, and my men were routed with considerable loss. Some were taken prisoners; and some were hung up to the roadside trees to dry in the sun. Those who escaped by flight rushed into the camp in great haste and disorder this evening."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Justin.

"Exactly; but you see this thing works both ways. For instance, when they learned we had a Yankee colonel here as a prisoner—you heard the row they raised—they called for life in retaliation of their murdered comrades. I could not in common justice refuse them so reasonable a request. And so, Colonel Rosenthal," said Monck, once more coolly consulting his watch, "as it is now half-past eight o'clock, you have 'just thirty minutes to live.'"

"Oh, Heaven!" groaned Justin, dropping his head upon his hands and thinking of his young sister in her desolate orphanage, and of another still dearer than that sister, and realizing how the news of his dreadful doom would break those loving hearts.

"Come, come, man alive!" exclaimed Monck, heartily, "don't be cast down because you are going to be strung up. Fortune of war, you know, and it may be my fate to-morrow if I fall into the hands of the clock peddlers! Come, drink your brandy—it will set you up. And here: take something substantial with it," he added, rising from his place and going to the side-table to bring a plate of biscuits.

At that moment Justin felt a light hand laid upon his head. He looked up and saw Wing standing beside him. The boy was deadly pale, but perfectly calm.

"Listen, my colonel," he whispered: "there is one chance left to you for life. You know what we have heard of Monck—how he——"

The remainder of the sentence was breathed into the ear of Justin Rosenthal, whose countenance immediately cleared up.

"You have saved me again, Wing! But you—you, my boy?" he exclaimed, in a low tone.

"Oh, leave me to myself and to God! I shall be safe—I am always safe! Oh, believe it! believe it when I swear it to you. Hush! that monster is coming back!" said Wing, retreating to the door.

In fact, at that moment Monck did return, bringing in one hand a plate of biscuits, and in the other a plate of cheese, which he set before his prisoner, saying:

"Come! 'let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die;' or, rather, to-night, at least, you do!"

"All right!" exclaimed Justin, laughing. "A soldier must be ready to meet death at any moment and in any manner. Your health, Major Monck!" he added, pouring a little brandy into his glass.

"That's your sort! That's the way I like to see a man meet the King of Terrors! Come—I will pledge you in this glass, and then I suppose we must go out and begin the ceremonies. Thunder! how time flies! It is actually a quarter to nine. We must make haste," said Monck, filling his glass and approaching to touch the glass that Justin held toward him.

As the glasses clinked, the eyes of the two men met, and Justin, with a peculiar gesture, too slight to be noticed by an ordinary observer, raised to his lips, and then set it down.

The glass of Monck nearly fell from his hand. He stared steadily at his prisoner for a full minute and then demanded:

"What was that for? Was that an accident or not?"

"What an accident?" inquired Justin, innocently.

"That—that! Are you—But nonsense! I suppose it was an accident. Come, Colonel Rosenthal! ten minutes to nine, and we have got to go out. Come! it will be all over in a few minutes. What I do is not done in malice, and I hope you will bear no malice toward me," said Monck, rising from the table.

"None whatever. In pledge of which, before we leave the board, let us shake hands," said Justin, rising, and offering his hand to the guerrilla.

"Quite right!" exclaimed Monck, heartily, clapping his fat hand into the extended palm of Justin, who gave it a peculiar grip and shake.

Suddenly Monck sank down into his seat as if he had been shot.

"Then it wasn't an accident!" he exclaimed, staring at his intended victim.

"No."

"And you are——"

"Yes."

"Then I'm dashed if I can hang you! And a devil of a dilemma it places me in!" muttered the guerrilla chief-

tain, placing his great hands upon his knees, and dropping his head upon his breast in deep thought.

Then he got up and went to the door and spoke to the sentinel on duty there, saying:

"Rushley, pass the word for Captain Bannister to come here."

Then he began to walk uneasily up and down the floor.

In a very few minutes Captain Bannister came in, wearing a grave and anxious expression of countenance.

Monck met him near the door, drew his arm within his own, and walked him off toward one of the windows; but not until Justin had heard Bannister say, in a low voice:

"Nothing has occurred since my connection with this band that has so seriously distressed me as the doom of this gentleman. Major Monck, if it be possible, save him. His execution would cover us with obloquy."

"That is just what I sent for you to consult about," answered Monck, as they both passed, arm in arm, out of Justin's hearing.

They stood within the recess of the window, conversing in a low tone, for some ten or fifteen minutes, at the end of which Monck nodded his head and approached the table. He took writing materials from the drawer, sat down and hastily scratched off a few lines on a slip of paper, which he handed to Captain Bannister, saying:

"You will leave this room by the back door, which will take you into the back yard. Go, then, through the garden and orchard, and around by the old field, and so make a circuit to the ferry. In that way you will escape showing your prisoner to the disaffected men who have come in from that luckless expedition. As for the other men, it does not matter, as they are not nearly so blood-thirsty! The devil is in it that I should have to pass a prisoner out of camp in this surreptious way. No matter. Wait until we join our forces with that of Goldsborough and the Free Sword, and we will see whether better discipline cannot be maintained among these wild colts."

Captain Bannister received the written paper with a bow and then turned toward Justin.

"Colonel Rosenthal," said Monck, "I place you in the

hands of Captain Bannister, who will see you safely beyond our lines."

Justin bowed grimly, and then inquired:

"My two orderlies?"

"Their lives will be safe. We don't hang children! We shall hold them prisoners until they are exchanged. And now, for Heaven's sake, be off with yourself, and leave me to settle with those howling furies outside."

Thus urged, Justin followed Captain Bannister, who conducted him through the back door into a back yard, where they mounted two horses that stood ready saddled and bridled; and thence they rode through the garden and the orchard, and round where the edge of the woods skirted the old field, and by that covered path to the ferry, where they were challenged by the sentinel on duty.

Bannister gave the countersign, and passed with his companion.

The old ferryman came out of his house at the captain's summons, and got his boat ready. And in a few minutes Justin was safely landed on the other side of the river. His guard, however, did not leave him until they had passed all the pickets, and reached the extreme outposts of the guerrillas' encampment.

Then Captain Bannister took from his pocket the paper that Monck had given him, and handed it to Justin, saying:

"In case you should meet with any scouts of our band you have only to show them this paper and you will pass unmolested."

Justin took the paper with a bow, and then thanked Captain Bannister for all his courtesy.

"You will follow this path through the wood until you reach the turnpike road leading to W.—the same road upon which our men first surprised you," said Captain Bannister.

"Thanks! All right. I shall find the way," answered Justin.

And the two men parted—Captain Bannister returning toward the camp and Colonel Rosenthal proceeding on his way.

It was the same dark and narrow path, through the

thick, impenetrable forest, that he had traveled as a prisoner on the night previous. And his progress was, of course, as slow and difficult now as it had been then.

His soul was troubled, too, for the boys he had left behind. He was somewhat comforted by the assurance of Monck that their lives should be safe, and he was cheered by the recollection of Wing's words; but still he was most anxious to get on to W., that he might at once see to the exchange of the prisoners.

Two hours of slow riding brought him to the high-road, upon which he emerged just as the moon was rising and flooding all the valley with light.

Here, where there was no obstruction, he put spurs to his horse, and flew along at a furious rate of speed for several miles, when suddenly his horse fell lame.

He dismounted, and examined the creature's feet, hoping that he should find a pebble, or some transient irritation of that sort, the removal of which should restore the horse to the free use of his limbs. But he found nothing, and was at length forced to give up the search in the belief that the cause of lameness was something more serious and permanent than he had supposed. Justin was as merciful as he was courageous. He did not mount again; but, taking the bridle in his hand, walked on, leading the steed after him.

In this manner he had progressed slowly over another mile of the road, when he suddenly heard the clatter of horse's hoofs behind, and the next moment Wing rode up, and drew rein beside him.

"Wing!" he joyfully exclaimed.

"Yes, my Colonel, Wing. I am like the bad penny, always coming back to you," said the lad gayly, as he dismounted, and leading his horse, walked by his colonel's side.

"Oh, my dear boy! I am so delighted to see you safe! But how does it happen that you are here?"

"My colonel, it is easily explained. After I had given you that hint——"

"Ah, yes—that hint, my boy! It saved my life. And that is the third time you have come between me and certain death, my child," said Justin, earnestly.

"I was going to say that after I left the room, the

guards, obeying orders that had been given them, no doubt, took me up into a back attic and locked me in."

"Humph!"

"It was a place of utter darkness, and at first I could not see my hand before me. But gradually as my eyes became accustomed to the scene, I made out the form of a dormer window. While I was straining my eyes toward that square of thinner darkness, for it was no more, I heard a scraping and scratching on the outside of the window."

"Well?"

"I went to see what it meant. I found that the noise proceeding from the branch of a tall elm tree that was blown by the wind across the window. Then a means of escape suggested itself to me. I tried the window and found that I could hoist it. Then I peered out and perceived that with a little dexterity I might seize the branch of the elm and swing myself into the body of the tree, from whence I could easily get down to the ground."

"A dangerous experiment."

"But I had no other alternative than to try it. I turned back into the room and felt my way along the wall until I came to the door. I felt up and down the door to find whether there was any fastening by which I could secure it on the inside. I found a strong iron bolt. And I immediately bolted it, so that if anyone should come, they should not at once discover my flight."

"Your old precaution, Wing."

"Yes, sir. Then I went to the window, got out upon the sill, seized the branches of the elm and swung myself into the body of the tree, from which I climbed down to the ground. The back part of the encampment is not strongly guarded, you know. By creeping and crawling through the bushes and keeping in the deep shadows, I reached at last a path skirting the wood. I came along under the shadow of the wood until I heard a horseman galloping toward me. Then I took out the little revolver that I had carried safely in my bosom through all my adventures, and I cocked it to have it in readiness."

"Ah!"

"The horseman came on, saw me and ordered me to

halt. I replied with my revolver. And he dropped from his saddle. I went up and seized the horse by the bridle while I disengaged the foot of the rider from the stirrup. Then, still holding the horse by the bridle with one hand, I rifled the pockets of the rider with the other. I took from them nothing but a box of wax matches and a written paper which I found contained the countersign. Then I mounted the horse and rode down to the ferry, gave the countersign to the sleepy sentinel and to the tipsy ferryman, and was put across the river without difficulty. I made the best of my way through the forest, giving the countersign wherever challenged, until I passed beyond Monck's lines and reached the high road. And here I am."

"Wing, I have heard of a charmed life, but you seem to possess a charmed liberty. There is no such thing as keeping you a prisoner. But this rider whom you shot from his horse. Do you know who he was, my boy?" inquired Justin, uneasily.

"Yes, sir. Captain Bannister."

"Oh, Wing, what a fatal necessity! I am so sorry! He was a gallant fellow, if he was a guerrilla. And he was returning from seeing me safe through the lines!"

"I am sorry, too, sir, but it couldn't be helped. And if the thing was to be done over again, I should have to do it over again," said Wing, with a sigh.

"Where is your comrade? Where is Hay?" inquired Colonel Rosenthal.

"I do not know, sir. I have not seen him since we ate our supper together this evening, but I presume he is still in the guerrilla camp. But what is the matter with your horse, sir?"

"He has fallen lame, Wing."

"A pebble in his shoe, perhaps?"

"No; I have examined carefully; there is nothing of the kind."

"Will you let me look, sir?"

"Certainly, if you like," said the colonel, taking the bridles of both horses in his hands so as to leave Wing at liberty to make the examination he wished.

"See here, sir. It was not a pebble, but it was some-

thing worse," said the boy, drawing a thorn from the horse's foot, and holding it up to view.

"Now, then, why couldn't I have seen that?" exclaimed Justin, in some surprise and impatience.

"Because it was not easy to be seen, sir. I did not see it. I felt it with the ends of my fingers."

"You have a very delicate touch, Wing—as delicate as a woman's."

"I think you can mount your horse now, sir. I think he will go without trouble," said the boy.

And Colonel Rosenthal got into his saddle and rode on toward W., followed by his favorite orderly.

Day was breaking when they rode into the town.

They went immediately to the headquarters of General W., to whom Colonel Rosenthal reported.

Active preparations were set on foot in W. for an expedition against the guerrilla bands who were now ascertained to have joined forces at the Black Bear's Pass, from which point they were preparing to make a descent upon Maryland.

And now it is time to return to Elfie, and see how she fares with her wild lover.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARRIED BY FORCE.

There was little sleep for Elfie and Alberta that night in their rude home in the Devil's Retreat. They rose early on the morrow and while they breakfasted together upon the dried grass before the hut Corsoni approached and joined them at the meal.

"I am sorry to tell you, Miss Fielding," he said, with a bow to Elfie, "that Colonel Goldsborough has left the camp for an absence of several days."

Elfie looked up in surprise.

"He has left you in our charge, and I need scarcely say that we will do all in our power to make you comfortable," he continued.

"I thank you very much, Colonel Corsoni, for your news. I am very glad to hear that the kidnapper has

taken his departure. And I fervently pray he may never return," said Elfie.

Vittorio Corsoni shrugged his shoulders.

"He may never return, indeed, Miss Fielding, for the duty he has voluntarily assumed is one of great danger as well as of great honor."

"Oh, no fear for him. He will be back again all too soon and too surely. It is absolutely wonderful what care Satan takes of his own," said Elfie.

Again Vittorio shrugged his shoulders, and the conversation ended. And soon after the breakfast came to a close, and Corsoni arose and left the spot.

All that day men in large numbers continued to arrive at the rendezvous—some who were returning stragglers, some who had been absent on leave, and some who were new recruits. All that day there were company drills in various parts of the camp.

Several days went by in this manner, and still new men continued to come and swell the numbers of the band.

But Albert Goldsborough did not return, nor did Monck, whose arrival was daily expected, make his appearance.

Elfie could perceive that the Free Sword was growing extremely anxious on the subject of the prolonged absence of the two guerrilla leaders.

Elfie kept a sharp lookout. And on the seventh day of Goldsborough's absence, she discovered that Colonel Corsoni sent out scouts on the perilous duty of looking after the missing men.

On the morning of the eighth day Elfie was as usual aroused by the rolling of the *reveillé*.

She arose and began to arrange her dress, while waiting for Alberta, whom she did not see, but who, she naturally supposed, had, as usual, left the hut to procure water for their morning ablutions.

At length, when she was quite ready for breakfast, and a little tired of waiting for Alberta, she lifted the curtain of her doorway, and passed out of the hut.

There, to her surprise, she found a breakfast arranged for one, and Mutchison, as waiter, in attendance.

"What is the meaning of this, you monstrous villain?

Where is Madame Corsoni? And how dare you show your face before me?" indignantly demanded Elfie.

"One question at a time, young lady, if you please. The meaning of this is your breakfast, with me to serve it. Madame Corsoni has gone with her husband, who, at the head of all his command, left the camp at midnight. I show my face to tell you this," answered Mutchison, grimly.

"Alberta gone!" breathlessly exclaimed Elfie.

"Yes; she always goes with her husband. I wish to the Lord I had such a wife."

"Heaven and earth! what will become of me?" exclaimed Elfie, in a greater panic than she had ever yet experienced.

"Matrimony will become of you, my dear young lady. Colonel Goldsborough arrived here last night, some three hours before the departure of the Free Sword. He brought the marriage license from the county court house with him. And he is now making active preparations for the wedding, which must take place before we march, which we shall do at sharp noon. Come, young lady. I can imagine that a bride has but little appetite on the morning of her wedding day. But allow me at least to pour out for you a cup of coffee."

"You monster! you miscreant! I would see you and your master both in the deepest pit of perdition, before I would take anything from you!" furiously exclaimed Elfie, dashing the cup of coffee from the hand of Mutchison, and turning and rushing into the hut.

But, ah! she had no means of fastening herself within, or keeping any one else without, that frail shelter. Nothing but a curtain hung between her and her pursuers.

And that curtain was presently lifted by Albert Goldsborough, who entered the hut and stood before his beloved.

Elfie whirled around upon him and stood like a stag at bay.

"Wretch! coward! miscreant! Shame on you for forcing yourself into my presence, where I have no means of keeping you out!" she fiercely exclaimed.

"Elfie, nonsense, my darling! You know that I love

you more than life; and you know that I know you love me; and so——"

But before Albert Goldsborough had got off half of this fine speech, Elfie, who was resolved not to remain alone with him for a moment, had bounded past him and through the doorway, to find herself—on the bosom of Mutchison, who had spread out his arms to intercept her flight. Elfie immediately drove her nails into his face.

"Catamountains! Here! take her off me, colonel! I wouldn't so much mind if she was my own sweetheart; but I'm dashed if I like to be clapper-clawed by yours! It don't pay! It's all thorns and no roses!" laughed the giant, as he tore Elfie away from his face and held her at arm's length toward Goldsborough, who snatched her to his heart and began to speak to her.

But Elfie stuck her fingers in her ears and screamed until she woke all the mountain echoes.

Then Albert threw his right arm around her, and brought down her hands from her ears and held them firmly with his right hand, while with his left he covered her lips to stop her shrieks and force her to hear him.

"Elfie," he said, "you know that I love you more than life. And you know that I know you love me. And it is right that we should be married; but, right or wrong, I am resolved to marry you to-day. Listen, you mad girl. Here you are in a guerrilla camp, the only woman in it. You have no longer Alberta's protection. And unless you have a husband, what is to become of your good name? What do you suppose people will say of you?" he demanded, removing his hand from her lips.

"What do I suppose people will say of me? What do you suppose I care? Could they say worse of me than that I should be your wife?" fiercely demanded Elfie, struggling vainly to free herself.

"Yes, Elfie. You know very well that they may say far worse of you than that, unless I prevent them. But they never shall say it, Elfie. I have got the marriage license and the wedding ring, and the minister is in my hut, only waiting my message to come and marry us."

"No minister will ever marry us against my consent."

"Elfie, I have said that to the Rev. Mr. Simmons which

convinces him that it is his duty to marry us. Come, Mutchison, we have no more time to lose. Go fetch the parson," ordered Albert Goldsborough.

The giant started on the errand.

"Ho!" called Goldsborough after him.

Mutchison looked back.

"Don't let any of the men know what's up. We don't want to afford them a spectacle in camp. See that they are kept at a proper distance from this."

"All right, sir," said the giant, striding on his way.

Albert Goldsborough raised Elfie in his arms and bore her into the hut.

"Mind this," said Elfie, whose very lips were white with rage, while her black eyes seemed to scintillate sparks of fire—"mind this, Albert Goldsborough! If you persist in this purpose, and if you succeed in carrying it out, I will kill you!"

"Perhaps you will, Elfie. You really look as if you would; but I will risk it," said Albert, firmly.

Presently Mutchison returned to the hut, and said:

"The parson is coming, sir."

"Mutchison, come here," said Albert Goldsborough.

And the giant came to his side.

"Now, then, Mutchison, I want you to place yourself immediately behind this obstinate little bride, and when the parson asks her if she will take this man to be her wedded husband, for better or worse (and she will find him much better than she hopes), I want you to put your hand upon her obstinate little head and bend it forward with a very emphatic assent. Get yourself into position. And then I will call on the parson."

"All right, colonel," said Mutchison, taking up his stand immediately behind Elfie, who was only pausing to gather strength for a fresh resistance.

"Come in, if you please, Mr. Simmons," called out Goldsborough.

And the parson lifted the curtain and entered the hut.

He was a tall, thin, light-haired man, very pale, nervous and consumptive. He was evidently a captive among the guerrillas, and as evidently frightened half to death.

"Hand him the license, Mutchison. Mutchison is here in the threefold capacity of bride's father, bridegroom's

best man, and witness of the marriage," said Goldsborough.

Mutchison stepped forward, and placed the license in the trembling hands of the minister, and then stepped back, and resumed his position behind Elfie.

"Now proceed, sir, if you please," said Goldsborough.

The nervous minister unfolded and examined the license, and then put it into his pocket, from which he took a small prayer-book.

Opening the book, he commenced the marriage ceremony. And in his extreme trepidation, he commenced at the wrong end:

"'Forasmuch as this man and this woman hath consented——'"

"I have not consented! I had rather be hanged!" screamed Elfie, who had succeeded in wriggling her head free from the hand of her captor.

In this panic the parson dropped his book and fell into an ague fit.

"This wretch has carried me off by force! He is marrying me by force! I will never——" spluttered Elfie so far; but just here Albert succeeded in getting his hand over her mouth, and silenced her again.

Mutchison picked up the prayer-book and restored it to its owner.

"Go on!" thundered Goldsborough, with a furious stamp of his foot, that nearly caused the startled preacher to drop the volume again.

"Young lady, I have no option but to go on. I act under compulsion, as you do," said the preacher, beginning again:

"Forasmuch as this——"

"Oh, Mr. Simmons, you look like a good man," begged Elfie, who had twisted her head free—"and you may have sisters of your own; for their sakes——"

But here Albert Goldsborough stopped her mouth again, and roared at the unfortunate parson to proceed.

"You see, young lady, I have no alternative but to do what I am about to do. The man threatened to hang me if I refused," pleaded the minister.

"And the man will keep his word," added Goldsborough.

"And I have an old mother, and sisters also, as you suggested, depending on me for support. So I must do the bidding of this man. And, besides, my dear young lady, as you are in the power of these men, it is far better that you should be lawfully married to their leader. If one of my young sisters were in your place, unless she could be immediately rescued, I should thank the first one in authority to lawfully marry her to her captor."

"Come, then! Stop this nonsense, and go on, or we will find a way to quicken your motions!" thundered Goldsborough.

Thus strongly urged, the poor preacher once more opened his book, found the place, and commenced the marriage ceremony.

The rites proceeded quietly enough, for Elfie's hands were held too fast, and her lips were covered too closely for her to offer any successful resistance.

When the bridegroom was asked:

"'Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?'"

Goldsborough answered in a loud, firm, sonorous voice:

"'I will.'"

When the similar question was put to the bride, Mutchison clapped his hand upon Elfie's head and bent it down in assent.

When the minister, proceeding with the ceremony, inquired:

"'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?'"

Mutchison answered, in a bold voice:

"'I do.'"

The ring was then forced upon the bride's finger, and the marriage ceremony was concluded in the usual manner.

"And now take notice that I have done this deed under compulsion! I wash my hands of the sin, and cast it upon the backs of those to whom it belongs!" said the persecuted preacher, turning to leave the hut.

"Exactly! Our backs are broad enough to bear it," laughed Albert Goldsborough. Then turning to Mutchison, he said: "Go after him, and make him a tumbler of milk punch to set him up again. And leave me alone with my wife, that I may reconcile her to her husband."

giving me the mysterious information that you were under the protection of Madam Corsoni."

"Oh, Alberta! Poor, poor Alberta!" sighed Elfie.

"What about her, my dear?" inquired Miss Rosenthal.

"Oh, Erminie, as I said before, I have so much to tell you! You have no idea where Britomarte is?"

"None in the world, unless she is living in obscurity somewhere in Baltimore and perhaps acting on the stage under an assumed name. Her letters give no information of her manner of life, and they bear no address, except the broad one—Baltimore."

"She is not in Baltimore. She is, however, acting under an assumed name an important part, in the greatest drama and on the broadest stage the world has ever seen."

"In the name of Heaven, Elfie, what do you mean?" demanded Erminie.

"I have no right to explain. I had no right even to say as much as I have said. But this I will impart—that it is to Britomarte's tact, courage and heroism that I owe my deliverance from a fate far worse than death, and Colonel Rosenthal owes the most signal victory of his military career—a victory that has rid the Valley of the Shenandoah from one of its greatest scourges, and that will certainly make the victor a brigadier-general," said Elfie, in sympathetic pride.

"You astonish me more and more. You amaze me, Elfie! Was Britomarte a spy?" inquired Erminie, her large brown eyes dilating to double their size.

"I am not in Britomarte's confidence. And if I were so, or even if I had discovered her secrets by chance, I, who owe my earthly salvation to her—I should be an ingrate and a traitor to betray her. So you see I cannot clearly explain my words. But I will relate my adventures among the guerrillas, and when you have heard them you may judge for yourself and guess what you like; so that you hold your tongue as discreetly, or rather, let us hope, more discreetly than I have held mine," said Elfie, as she poured out for herself another cup of tea.

"Do so, then, my dear. I am very anxious to hear all you have to tell me," urged Erminie.

Elfie drank her tea and then began the story of her captivity.

As she spoke of the spy in the camp of the Free Sword, Erminie nodded her head several times with a look of comprehension; but she made no comment in words.

When Elfie came to speak of her forced marriage she wept with anger and mortification; but Erminie assured her, as Justin had done before, that the marriage was null and void in law.

"Marriage is mutual consent, Elfie, and there was no mutual consent there," she urged.

"You may be right, or you may be wrong, Erminie. I shall take counsel of both clergymen and lawyers before I venture to decide a question in which my honor is concerned. I would rather be a wretched wife than an erring woman any time. But let me go on with my story. Ah, Heaven! the worst is behind! There were greater sufferers than myself in it!"

"Justin?" anxiously exclaimed Erminie.

"I told you before that he was alive and well. Have you forgotten that?"

"Who, then?"

"Alberta! poor, poor Alberta!"

"You spoke of her just now. Of course, she could not have been otherwise than most wretched in the life she led, poor woman! But I hope no greater misfortune overtook her!" said Erminie.

"I will tell you," sighed Elfie.

And then she resumed the thread of her narrative, describing the march of Goldsborough's guerrillas and the battle of the hill, in which Colonel Rosenthal routed the guerrillas, and in which the Free Sword and his wife were killed.

"Killed! Oh, merciful Heaven, not that! Don't say that Alberta was killed in battle!" exclaimed Erminie, clasping her hands tightly, while her eyes dilated with horror and amazement.

"Yes, she was killed," wept Elfie.

"But how was that?"

"Oh, it seems that she would not leave him. You know what a will she had. She would not leave him. She rode by his side through all that bloody day! This

is the way I heard the story: His horse was shot under him. She jumped from her saddle and insisted on his mounting hers, and at that moment she saw one of our sharpshooters aim a rifle at him, and quick as lightning she threw herself before him and received the shot in her heart! Oh! Erminie, it was a deadly minie ball! It passed quite through her body, killing her instantly, and entered the bosom which she tried to shield, wounding it mortally."

"Oh! Heaven of Heavens!" exclaimed Erminie, sobbing for pity.

"So the same ball killed them both; but not at the same instant. He, in his great sorrow, never felt his own wound! He bore her off the field, and sat down with her under the trees at the entrance of an old turnpike road. His disappearance seemed to decide the fortunes of the day. The guerrillas lost hope and fled. Some fled down the old turnpike road; and, seeing Corsoni sitting there with his dead wife in his arms, they urged him to get up and fly for his life; but he paid no attention to them. They told him that our cavalry were in hot pursuit, and would certainly capture him if he should remain where he was. But he scarcely seemed to hear their words. They reminded him that when he should be taken an ignominious death awaited him. He did not seem to care for that or for anything on earth but the face of his dead wife, for he never lifted his eyes from it."

"His heart must have been broken!" wept Erminie.

"It was! Justin says it would have moved his bitterest enemy to compassion to have seen him when he was captured. Some of our cavalrymen rode up and very naturally swore at him, and called him hard names, and ordered him to yield. He did not return railing for railing, but without lifting his face from the still face of his wife, he answered simply, 'I yield.' Justin rode up, and, seeing this sight, ordered the men to withdraw; and then he himself advanced to receive Corsoni's sword. But first he spoke some few words of sympathy and compassion for the prisoner's awful sorrow. Corsoni did not once reply; but laid the body of his beloved wife

down and arose to deliver up his sword. In the act of doing so——"

Elfie broke down and wept convulsively for some moments before she could resume her story.

—"The blood began to spout like a fountain from a wound in his chest. And Justin said, 'You are hurt.' And he answered, 'Am I? I didn't know.' And with these words on his lips he fell dead beside his wife."

Erminie was weeping, and it was some time before she could speak. When she did, it was to say:

"Perhaps theirs was the best fate that could have befallen them—I mean under the circumstances."

"We all thought so. They were buried side by side in an old country churchyard. It spoke well for the tenderness of our poor soldiers that, tired as they were, they were willing to march three miles to lay the poor woman's remains in consecrated ground; and they laid her husband's body beside her."

"May they rest in peace!" said Erminie, solemnly.

"Amen!" breathed Elfie.

The two girls fell into a thoughtful silence until Erminie arose to ring the bell for Catherine to remove the tea service.

And then, as it was twelve o'clock, the friends kissed each other good night, and Elfie went to her own old room that Catherine had prepared for her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ELFIE VISITS LITTLE MIM.

"Well, here it is, and a meagre account enough" said Elfie, opening the morning paper as she sat with Erminie at breakfast in the library—"not ten lines of description, if it were put in common type, but filling nearly a whole column in great capital letters like posters."

"What is it, dear?" inquired Erminie, who was arranging her cups and saucers on the breakfast tray.

"The morning paper's account of the engagement I described to you at full length last night."

"Read about it, dear, while I pour out our coffee."

"It is hardly worth reading. It isn't a hundredth part of what I told you myself. But if you want to hear it, here goes:

Battle of Bleak Hill. Defeat of the guerrillas. Death of the notorious Free Sword.

Elfie read these headings, which were in very conspicuous type. And then she went on with the description of the fight, with the details of which our readers are already familiar.

"I suppose that the news came by the same train that brought me last night, although it could not be made public until this morning," said Elfie, as she laid aside the paper.

When they had finished breakfast, and the young mistress of the house had issued her orders for the day to cook, housemaid and man-servant, the two young ladies went upstairs together.

"I can't attend you in your rounds through the hospitals this morning, Erminie, dear, for I must go first to see little Mim. I heard on the way that he was injured," said Elfie, as they parted on the landing, each to seek her own room.

"But you will go with me this afternoon?" urged Erminie, with her hand on the knob of her door.

"Oh, yes—certainly," answered Elfie, as she disappeared in her chamber.

The two girls came down together dressed to go out. But they parted at the gate, as their paths lay in opposite directions.

Erminie entered the little carriage that was to take her first to the Douglas Hospital.

Elfie walked rapidly toward Pennsylvania avenue, where she stopped a Navy-Yard car, which took her to the eastern suburbs of the city.

She got out of the car at the corner of a quiet street, mostly built up in small, detached houses, with small flower yards before them.

Elfie walked briskly on until she reached a little cottage in a large garden full of fruit trees, where Mim lived with his maiden aunts, four little bits of old ladies, with

thin faces, and fair hair, and blue eyes, who were as "like as peas in a pod" to each other, and to Mim himself, who loved them sincerely, and who supported them willingly off his small salary as salesman in a fancy bazaar. "They had all lived single for his sake, and brought him up from a baby," said creduluous little Mim, "and now he would live single for their sakes, and take care of them in their age."

Elfie, in her eagerness, pulled open the garden gate, and ran up the walk and rang the bell.

One of the little old ladies answered the ring.

"Oh, Miss Suzy, how is Mr. Mim? And can I see him?" the visitor exclaimed.

"Oh, Miss Elfie, I am so glad to see you back safe. And Mim is much better, thank you. And of course you can see him immediately, for I do think the sight of you will quite set him up. But maybe I'd better go and break it to him first. His poor head is rather weak yet, and a sudden shock might bring on the fever again."

"Yes, I think you had better do so, Miss Suzy, and I will wait here until you come back."

"Do. And I will send my sisters to see you. They will be so glad you've come," said the little old lady, as she left the room.

Elfie sat down in the pleasant, rural-like parlor, with its plain, old-fashioned furniture and chintz curtains and chair covers, and waited until she was joined by the three other little old ladies, Miss Sophy, Miss Sary and Miss Molly, who all came running to her, and who all kissed her and made a great crowing over her until the return of their elder sister.

Miss Suzy led Elfie upstairs to a clean, whitewashed and white-curtained chamber, where, in a white-covered easy chair, little Mim, in his dressing gown and slippers, and with his head bound up, reclined.

He made an effort to rise and receive his visitor, but fell back immediately upon his cushions.

"Oh, Mim, dear, don't try to get up, please. I will come and sit quite close to you, if Miss Suzy will let me," said Elfie, gently going to his side, and taking his thin hand, and looking piteously in his pale face.

"Miss Fielding, this is so kind of you to come to see

me. It does me so much good. You can't think how anxious I have been to hear of your safety. I think anxiety kept me back from recovery more than anything else. I am so grateful to you for taking the trouble of coming to see me to-day," said the little hero.

"Oh, Mim, dear, what is there I wouldn't do to show my sense of your worth and my obligation to you!" said Elfie, with feeling, as she seated herself in the chair that Miss Suzy had been holding behind her, and mutely pressing her to take.

"You overwhelm me, Miss Fielding—you do, indeed," said little Mim, with emotion. "I have the greatest respect for you, and for all the ladies, and I thought it was no more than just natural to lay down my life for you, if necessary—what any man would do for any lady."

"But, dear Mim, we had proof enough that day that there wasn't a man on the ground who was willing to risk getting his head broken to save me from being carried off by the guerrillas, except yourself. Oh, dear Mim, what shall I ever do to prove how much I thank and honor you?"

Little Mim blushed up to the edges of his hair, and could not find words to reply.

"Oh, dear, deary me," sighed Miss Suzy to herself, "I hope she won't marry him out'n gratitude. I truly hope and trust she won't marry him out'n gratitude. Her property is all constipated by the rebels, and he hasn't the means, with his little salary, of supporting us and a wife, and a whole lot of little ones besides. Lord have mercy upon us!"

While Miss Suzy thus bemoaned herself, little Mim found his tongue, and answered, like a miniature Bayard or Roland:

"Miss Fielding, I now thank Heaven for my broken head, and for every pain that I have suffered in your cause. Miss Fielding, I would have had not only my head, but every bone in my body broken, to have proved my regard for you, or for any of the ladies, and to have awakened such esteem in your mind would have been consolation and reward enough," he added with enthusiasm.

Shortly afterward Elfie left the room, escorted by Miss Suzy, who though she really liked her young visitor very well, was now heartily glad to see her out.

In the room below the other sisters had a nice little luncheon spread out upon a table covered with a clean cloth. Tea and toast, chipped beef and light biscuits; and stewed apples and new milk.

They pressed Elfie so hospitably that she was obliged to sit down and partake of the refreshments.

After which she thanked them and took leave.

When Elfie was fairly out of the front garden-gate, Miss Suzy closed the house-door and then turned to her sisters and raised her fingers in mysterious warning.

"Whatever is the matter now?" inquired Miss Molly, and echoed Miss Sophy, and Miss Sarah, gazing at their elder sister in perplexity and uneasiness.

"We don't want Jim to marry, do we?" she inquired.

"Oh, Lor'!" exclaimed the other sisters, in horrified chorus.

"Well, then, we must keep a good look-out! She's a nice girl and I like her! but if we don't take care, she'll marry Jim, whether or no!"

"Marry Jim!" echoed all the other sisters.

And if Miss Suzy had said, "She will murder Jim," and they had believed her, her words could not have caused more consternation.

"Yes, she will!" repeated the elder sister.

"Marry Jim! Our Jim! Oh, no! she's a pretty girl, and a clever girl, and a good girl, and we like her! but we can't afford to let her have our Jim! Our Jim must not marry."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FACE TO FACE AGAIN.

When Elfie got back to the parsonage she found Erminie waiting for her in the library, where the dinner table for two had been set.

At Elfie's age girls can eat a hearty luncheon and immediately afterward eat a hearty dinner, and suffer no inconvenience from indigestion either.

So Elfie sat down to the table and opened her napkin.

"How is Mr. Mim?" kindly inquired Erminie.

"Poor fellow! I do believe but for his strict temperance habits, that blow would have killed him. At it is, he is getting well fast, just as you told me. His head is weak yet, though. And I took care not to excite him. I didn't breathe a word to him of my adventures among the guerrillas. I allowed him to take it for granted that I had been sent home under a flag of truce."

"And he knows nothing of your forced marriage?"

"Not a word."

"Nor of the battle with the guerrillas?"

"No."

"But I should think he would see that in the newspapers."

"They don't allow him to look at one in the present state of his health. But, Erminie, tell me about your *protégées* in the hospitals."

"Nearly all my boys are doing very well, Elfie. Two of them, only, will die. One has his mother with him, and if mother and son were not both such earnest Christians it would half break my heart to see them, for she is an old woman and he is her youngest son and only surviving child. The other boy is far from every friend he has in the world, and so he is my own peculiar charge. He, too, is a child of God, and will meet death as serenely as if he were eighty years old instead of eighteen. Just as I left the hospital they told me that a train of ambulances had arrived, bringing in a large number of wounded from some recent battlefield. So we shall have a plenty of work on our hands, Elfie. I have four hampers of lint sent me from the North. And directly after dinner we shall have to take a carriage and carry it to the hospitals. It must be wanted now."

"Oh, Heaven help us, Erminie! We not only 'sup full of horrors,' but it seems to me we rise, breakfast, dine, sup and sleep full of horrors, in these war times. I don't know how you can stand it, Erminie. Has it hardened or strengthened you?"

"Strengthened me, I hope, dearest," answered Miss Rosenthal, as she arose from the table.

Bob was dispatched to the livery stable where Erminie

kept her little carriage and horse. And Catherine was sent up into the attic to the linen room to fetch down the hampers of lint.

And so, when Erminie and Elfie came down ready dressed to go out, they found the carriage at the door and the hampers stowed within it, and old Bob on the coachman's box.

"Drive to the hospital, Robert," said Miss Rosenthal.

A drive of some twenty minutes brought them to the front of the extension buildings.

"I declare, it looks like a funeral here," said Elfie, noticing the crowd of ambulances that were drawn up before the hospital.

But when the two girls alighted and Elfie had a nearer view and saw wounded men piled like slaughtered cattle in those ambulances, and bleeding men carried up the steps of the hospital; and when they entered the building and she found the atmosphere pervaded with the scent of fresh blood, and the staircase slippery with gore, she could restrain herself no longer, but screamed and hid her face against Erminie's black robe.

"Elfie! Elfie! if you cannot command your feelings, my dear, you must return to the carriage. You can do no good here unless you are calm and strong," whispered Erminie.

"Oh, but I never saw anything so horrible! It is like human shambles, and it turns me sick. I have been here many, many times, but never saw anything like this!" shuddered Elfie.

"Because you have never before happened to be here when they were bringing in the recently wounded. You had better go back to the carriage, Elfie."

"No, no; pray let me go on with you. I will not give way again, indeed I will not," said Elfie, lifting her face.

And she kept her promise, although there passed her at that moment two soldiers, bearing between them a ghastly burden—a man with a livid face, and a bandaged head crimsoned with blood.

Old Bob, with a hamper of lint under each arm, followed the two young ladies.

Erminie led the way up the flight of stairs to the first floor, and turned at once to the clothing room at-

tached to that ward, and under the charge of a Sister of Mercy.

It was a room furnished all around with shelves and drawers like a dry goods store, and filled with ready-made underclothing, dressing gowns, bed linen and napery.

A mild-eyed, black-robed young sister arose to receive the visitor.

"I have brought you a fresh supply of lint, Sister Agnes," said Erminie.

"Ah, yes; we are very glad to have it; it is very much wanted. We had not near enough for the fresh cases we have received to-day."

"From what battlefield do these come, Sister, do you know?"

"I don't. Some of them came up by the steamboats. So I suppose there has been another battle somewhere down the river. And some of them, I know, came by railroad from the valley, where there has been a fight with the guerrillas."

"Oh!" said Erminie.

And then as time was too precious to be spent in talking, she took up the large basket of oranges she had brought, and bowing adieu to this "mistress of the robes," she passed down the corridor, attended by Elfie, and followed by Bob, who had been back to the carriage and had returned with a large basket of jellies and fruits.

"I visited one-half the wards this morning, and I must look into the others this afternoon," said Erminie, as she turned to the right and opened a door leading into a long room, furnished with a double row of little white beds, on most of which lay wounded men.

Smiles of glad welcome greeted this young angel visitant as soon as she appeared.

"Here, Elfie. You take this basket of oranges, dear, and go down one row of beds while I go down the other. And give each man one. Sister Frances says that the men in this ward may all eat fruit," said Erminie.

Elfie took the basket of oranges, and went down the row of beds as she was bid, pausing at each to speak a kind and cheering word and to give an orange.

At length she reached the very last little bed in the corner, and without looking at its occupant, she said:

"Well, you are the last, but you will not be the worst served soldier. Here is the very finest orange in the whole lot. Just as if I had saved it on purpose for you. I hope it will refresh you. And—I hope you are not badly wounded."

"Elfie!" in a feeble voice exclaimed the wounded man.

"Great Heaven!" cried the girl, starting, and nearly dropping her basket of oranges.

She stood beside the bed of Albert Goldsborough.

"Elfie, didn't you know me?" he sadly and faintly inquired.

"No. I was picking out the biggest orange for the man who had to wait the longest, and so I didn't look at you, and didn't know you. You might have been sure of that. And now that I do know you, I take back all I said and all I gave. Hand me that orange. I have nothing for you."

"Not even forgiveness, Elfie?" he sighed, as he restored the fruit.

"Nothing," she answered, grimly, turning from him and walking back.

The hospital beds were very narrow and very near together. The wounded soldier that occupied the one next to Albert Goldsborough heard and saw all that had passed between him and Elfie.

Now turning painfully on his side, he stretched out his hand toward Goldsborough and said:

"Here, Reb, take half my orange. Do, now—you're welcome to it. A Reb. boy gave me half his bread and water while we lay together on the battlefield before I was brought here, and I haven't forgot that yet! Take half my orange, Reb., or if you're thirsty take the whole."

Albert Goldsborough smiled and shook his head, saying:

"I thank you, but cannot take it. The lady who gave it would not like the transfer."

Elfie heard all this and felt ashamed. She stopped short and burst into tears. She was almost hysterical with contradictory emotions. But she knew it would never do to make a scene in the ward of a hospital.

"The noble soldiers! they cherish no feelings of bitter malignity against our brave foes. It is only we, miserable, mean, little non-combatants, who never risked our lives in the cause, who are as venomous as reptiles! I will follow the example of our dear Union boy there," thought Elfie, as she hurried to the side of the young soldier of whom she had spoken, and said, with emotion:

"You are better than I am! You are a brave, good, generous fellow, and I hope I shall know more of you."

The young soldier smiled and said, a little obscurely:

"You see, miss, we must save the Union at any cost; but we don't all hate each other for all that."

"No," replied Elfie, humbly. And she passed on to Goldsborough's bed and said:

"Albert, I didn't mean it—indeed I didn't! Take the orange again, dear—do! It isn't you that I am angry with. It is treason. And my feelings are so contradictory—pull so violently opposite ways—that I feel as if my very soul was being drawn asunder by wild horses! Oh, if you had been true to your country! Oh, if you had only been true!" she exclaimed, dropping on her knees and hiding her face on the edge of his bed while she sobbed convulsively.

She felt his hand laid softly on her head, and presently afterward she heard him groan—a low, deep, irrepressible groan, that seemed to have been wrung from him by extreme agony.

Elfie lifted her tearful face and took his hand in hers. That hand was burning with fever.

"Are you wounded, Albert? Are you wounded badly? Tell me, dear."

"Yes, Elfie, badly."

"I knew that you were taken prisoner; but I had no idea that you were hurt until I saw you here. How did it happen? Tell me all about it, dear, unless it troubles you to talk. If it does, don't speak."

"It relieves me to talk to you, Elfie. When I turned from the lost battlefield, it was to hurry to the spot where I left you to provide for your safety. But I was pursued, and when I was about half way across the plain, between the hill and the grove, a minie ball from a sharp-

shooter struck my leg above the knee and shattered the bone——"

"Oh! my dear——"

"Almost at the same time I saw a troop of horse galloping from the opposite direction. In a moment, Elfie, I was surrounded and captured. And they took me at once to Colonel Rosenthal. But, Elfie, as I sat there in my saddle before him, my limb hung a shattered, useless, helpless mass beside my horse's flank. I did not speak as I handed him my sword. I was very glad not to be spoken to; for if I had been obliged to open my compressed lips to answer I should have groaned in agony. And I didn't want my enemy to hear me do that."

"Oh, Albert, I am sorry! I am so sorry! Is it very painful now, dear? Have they dressed it well?"

"They have dressed it very well, Elfie; and they are trying to save it, but it is so very painful now that I doubt if they can do so."

"Oh, Albert, there is no danger of your losing your limb?"

"We shall know by to-morrow morning whether we can save it or not. But, Elfie, I am not so anxious to save my limb as I am to obtain your forgiveness for the great wrong that I did you," he said.

"Oh! Albert, dear, don't, don't talk of that. It is past; and don't you see, dear, that I am friends with you?"

"Thanks, Elfie—thanks! You should understand, Elfie, that farce of a marriage, with the license, and ring, and parson, and prayer book, all regular, was yet of no sort of value in law, unless it should be ratified by your consent," he said.

"I know—I know, Albert. But do not let us talk of such exciting things. Your fever is rising, and—here comes Erminie."

Miss Rosenthal had not passed down her side of the ward as quickly as Elfie had passed down hers. Erminie's walk was more like that of a physician in charge. She was familiar there. She had to stop by the side of every bed and hold a conversation with the patient or a consultation with the nurse. And so her progress was slow.

Now, however, having got to the end of her row of beds, she approached her friend, and saw the new patient.

"Albert Goldsborough! is it possible?" she exclaimed, in surprise—surprise immediately suppressed by her habitual caution as a hospital visitor.

"Yes, Miss Rosenthal, I am here," he answered.

"I am very, very sorry to see you lying thus," said Erminie, taking his hand and laying her finger upon his pulse. "You are feverish and must not give me a word of explanation yet. Elfie, my dear, your presence is no sedative just now," she added, turning to the weeping girl, "so you must go down. Inquire your way to the office of the surgeon in charge and ask him, in my name, to send one of his assistants here, for here is a patient who needs immediate attention."

Elfie arose, but before leaving the spot, stooped over the wounded man and kissed his forehead, murmuring:

"Good-by, Albert. If you ever doubted my reconciliation to you, believe it now."

"Thanks, dear Elfie! You will come again?" he said, holding her hand and detaining her.

"Yes, I will come as often and stay as long as they will let me," she sobbed.

"Now, go, Elfie, dear. Go at once. He is suffering extremely for want of attention, and his wound must be looked to immediately," urged Erminie.

In a very few minutes one of the young assistant surgeons came up in answer to Miss Rosenthal's summons, and stood beside the bed of the suffering man.

"Yes, Miss Rosenthal, his wound must be looked to immediately," said the young man.

And Erminie got up to go.

"Good-by, Colonel Goldsborough. I will see you again to-morrow, when I hope you will be better," she said, gently.

"Good-by, Miss Rosenthal, and a thousand earnest thanks!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

POOR ELFIE'S HONEYMOON.

The next morning it was Elfie who was all impatience to get off to the hospital. On nearly all former occasions when Elfie was to be her companion in her rounds among the sick and wounded soldiers, Erminie had been very much "tried" by her friend's dilatory habits. But this morning Elfie was dressed and had the carriage at the door long before Erminie had got through her domestic duties of the forenoon. And so Elfie spent the time in walking impatiently up and down the hall, until at length Erminie made her appearance in bonnet and shawl.

"You will go to the hospital first?" inquired Elfie, anxiously, thinking and speaking as if the hospital in which Albert Goldsborough lay were the only one in the city.

"Yes, dear; for your sake I will go to 'the' hospital first; after which we will visit the others. But, Elfie, dear, excuse me if I urge you to take care not to compromise yourself."

"Now, Erminie, when did I ever take care of myself, in any way? You might as well ask a fish to fly. I cannot say to my heart, 'thus far—no farther.' I never could. Besides, Erminie, his livid, agonized face has haunted me all the night through. Don't say any more to me, please. I don't want to lose my self-possession again this morning. I don't want to go to the hospital with red eyes," said Elfie.

"Well, my dear, I will say no more—but this: Since you cannot take care of yourself, I pray Heaven to take care of you," said Miss Rosenthal.

They entered the carriage and were rapidly driven to the hospital.

Arrived there, they found all signs of yesterday's horrors effaced. The wounded had been all properly cared for, and the halls, stairs and lobbies had been washed.

Erminie had her usual short interview with the sur-

geon in charge, and then passed up, accompanied by Elfie, to the wards on the second floor. Elfie went at once to the ward in which Albert Goldsborough had been placed. She passed hastily between the two long lines of little beds, until she came to the end, when she stopped and uttered a half-suppressed cry.

Albert Goldsborough's bed was empty.

She turned her wild, dilated eyes, full of the question her lips could not utter, toward the Union soldier who occupied the next bed.

"Yes, poor fellow!" said the soldier, "they've taken him to the operating-room."

"'The operating-room!'" gasped Elfie, with suspended breath.

"Yes, miss."

"But—why have they taken him there?" she found power at last to speak.

"To amputate his leg, poor fellow!"

"To amputate his leg!" exclaimed Elfie, again echoing the soldier's words.

"Yes, miss, it was the only way of saving his life, it seems. This morning, when the assistant surgeon looked at his wound, he sent immediately for the surgeon in charge, and they both examined it together, and decided that the leg must be taken off at once, if the man's life was to be saved."

Elfie, unable to stand, sank, pale and trembling, down upon Albert Goldsborough's empty bed, and, sitting there with clasped hands and strained eyes, waited for the soldier's further words.

"The poor fellow objected very much; said that his leg had ceased to give any pain at all; that it was quite easy; and, except for weakness, he never felt better in his life; he had had the best night's rest he had ever enjoyed; his leg hadn't troubled him once; and he had waked up this morning quite refreshed, though rather feeble."

"Then why did they persist in the operation?" cried Elfie.

"To save his life, miss, as they explained to him. His freedom from pain was, under the circumstances, the worst possible symptom. Mortification had commenced

in the wound, and was rapidly extending upward, and it became necessary to amputate the limb without delay."

"And then he consented?" wept Elfie.

"Yes, miss."

"How long was that ago?"

"They removed him about ten minutes before you entered the ward, miss."

"So they are even now at their dreadful work! They have him even now stretched upon the ghastly operating-board, and are torturing his nerves and flesh with knife and saw!" shuddered Elfie. "Oh, Albert! oh, my love, my love, if I could bear it for you!"

And the loyal Union girl, who had discarded and defied her rebel lover in the days of his pride and his power, and who had believed her own words when she told him that the one burning aspiration of her heart was to see him hanged for his treason, now burst into a convulsion of sobs, and wept over his sufferings the sorest tears she had ever shed in her life.

"Don't distress yourself so much, miss. He will not feel it. He will know nothing after he is stretched upon the operating-board until it is all over. They are going to give him chloroform," said the young soldier, trying to comfort the weeping woman.

Elfie struggled to regain her self-command. She recollected with compunction that the hospital ward was not the place to indulge in the exhibition of strong emotions.

"Listen, miss," said the soldier boy—"I know he will not feel it. See, miss—I had my leg taken off two weeks ago, and I never felt it; and just look how well I'm getting over it."

There was an instantaneous sympathy in all the words and looks and actions of the impulsive girl.

"You had your leg taken off! And you are so quiet and patient and cheerful under it all! Oh, my poor boy, I didn't know it! I didn't, indeed, my poor child, or I wouldn't have been so indifferent to you!" she said, speaking to this young soldier, near her own age, as if he had been her son, or her little brother, and kneeling down by his bed to bring her compassionate face closer to his own.

"It is nothing near so bad as you seem to think, miss.

Bless you! see how many have lost both legs, or both arms, or one of each. And see how many have lost their lives. I consider myself one of the lucky ones, miss. Only I don't dare to write and tell mother yet. I don't know that I shall ever tell her. What would be the use? I think I shall wait and not go home until I get the brand new patent leg Uncle Sam is going to give me; and then I shall walk in on mother, in a new pair of boots, and she will never know what is in them, or that one of my limbs has gone to the grave before me."

"Are you your mother's only son?" inquired Elfie, still kneeling by the bed.

"Oh, no, miss," answered the boy, smiling; "and neither is she a widow. Mother has a husband and seven sons in the war. I am only her youngest. But, bless you, miss, she loves us all as if each was her only one."

"But if her husband and all her sons are in the war, who is at home with her?" inquired Elfie, not, however, forgetting the man on the table in the operating-room, even while feeling much interest in the new object of her sympathy.

"Our sister is at home with mother. And I really do believe," added the boy, smiling archly, "that nothing but their crinoline keeps them out of the army!"

"Nothing but our crinoline, if that is to stand for our sex, keeps thousands of us out of the army!" said Elfie.

At that moment the door at this end of the ward opened. and a little bustle ensued.

Elfie arose from her position, and held her breath in awe.

Through the door a small procession like a funeral train entered the ward.

Four men bore between them a bier, on which was spread a narrow mattress, with the motionless form of a man extended at full length on it, and covered with a white sheet, and altogether looking like a dead body.

Behind the bier walked the assistant surgeon.

This procession was simply that of the hospital nurses bringing in the mutilated man, still deep in the swoon of chloroform, and under the personal direction of the doctor.

But as they approached Elfie turned deadly pale and faint, and gasped forth the inquiry:

"Is he gone? Oh, is he gone? Has he died under that dreadful operation?"

"Oh, no, miss," said the young soldier, kindly; "he is only unconscious. He will recover as soon as they get him on the cot again."

Elfie caught her breath and clasped her hands, and struggled for composure.

The soldier nurses lifted the mattress, with its nearly lifeless burden, and laid it on the cot, and then turned down the sheet, and revealed the face of Albert Goldsborough, livid, but quiet, like the faces of those who have recently fallen asleep in death.

Elfie, holding her hands upon her heart, drew near, and took courage to ask the assistant surgeon:

"Doctor, oh, doctor, how did he bear the operation? Will he survive it? Oh, will he?"

The surgeon turned, and, seeing the anxious and pleading face, guessed at once that the inquirer was "something" to the sufferer, and answered, perhaps more kindly than truly:

"Yes, miss, we hope he will do well. You are a friend or relative of this man?"

"Dear me, doctor, if you were not a very recent arrival here, you would know me as well as you know the dispensary. I have been in the habit of coming here daily, with little intermission, for the last three years," said Elfie, rather impatiently evading the doctor's question.

"I have been here only for the last fortnight," he replied.

"Oh, I was away during that time. But I was here yesterday with Miss Rosenthal, and I brought you her message to come to this very patient."

"Oh, yes, I remember. But now, my dear young lady," said the surgeon, who had not once taken his finger from the pulse of the man on the cot since he had been laid there, "now my patient shows signs of recovery, and he must positively see no one near him but his physician and nurse. I must beg you to retire."

"But, doctor, I—I am his friend," said Elfie, at length driven to this confession.

"If you were his mother or his sister, his wife or his sweetheart, I could not let you see him, or, rather, I could not let him see you, when he wakes," said the surgeon, firmly, though kindly.

"Yes, Elfie, dear, you must let me take you away. Any sudden shock might be fatal to him when he wakes," said Erminie, who had come unperceived to her side.

Elfie turned away, with difficulty restraining her sobs. She paused a moment by the side of her new acquaintance on the next cot.

"Good-by, young soldier," she said. "I shall see you again to-morrow. And I hope we shall know you better. You are one of the heroes of this war. And I feel sure that your past courage in the field equalled your present fortitude in the hospital."

The boy blushed and smiled to hear such warm praises from such pretty lips, and he watched Elfie as long as she remained visible in the ward.

As soon as the two girls were in the little carriage again, Elfie suddenly seized Erminie and hysterically exclaimed:

"Oh, Erminie! Oh, Erminie! You saw him! You saw how livid and sunken he looked!"

"Yes, dear, I saw him."

"Oh, Erminie! You have been tending the sick and wounded in the hospitals for nearly four years, and you have had a great deal of experience. You know almost as much as the head surgeon himself, and a great deal more than these young undergraduates, who take off a man's limb so deftly. And you saw how he looked. Will he live? Will he live?"

"I hope and trust so, my dear," said Miss Rosenthal, gently.

"When people say they hope and trust, they always mean they don't believe," cried Elfie, wringing her hands.

Miss Rosenthal tried to turn the conversation.

"You forgot to keep your appointment with your little champion yesterday, Elfie."

"I had forgotten the very existence of little Mim," sobbed Elfie.

"Shall I tell the coachman to set you down there? It is directly on our way to the Emory Hospital."

"No, tell him to drive me first to the nearest bookseller's and then to the next fruit shop. I mustn't go empty-handed when I do go," said Elfie, remorsefully.

Miss Rosenthal gave the proper directions, the coachman drove to the designated places, and Elfie made her purchases, and in due time was set down at the gate of little Mim's cottage.

"Call and pick me up as you come back from the Emory, Erminie," said Elfie, as she passed through the gate.

"Certainly," smiled Miss Rosenthal as she entered the carriage, which immediately drove off.

Elfie was well received by the little old Misses Mim—all the better received because she had missed her appointment with them on the day before. It argued well for them they thought that she was not so over fond of Jim's society, and perhaps she was not so over anxious to marry him, after all, they said, nodding their heads together.

Little Mim himself welcomed his visitor with an effusion of gratitude. He stopped her apologies with his thanks, and accepted her books, and her fruit, and her company with delight.

Elfie sat two hours with him, but she refrained from mentioning the presence of Albert Goldsborough in the hospital. She refrained for two reasons—the fear of exciting the injured man, and the dread of hearing him abuse one who was now only the object of her compassion, her anxiety and her affection.

It was late in the afternoon when Miss Rosenthal called in the carriage, paid little Mim a short visit, and then took Elfie home.

The next morning Elfie was all feverish impatience to get to the hospital where Goldsborough lay.

And Ermine so strongly sympathized with her in her anxiety that she dispatched her domestic affairs in great haste, and was seated beside Elfie in the little carriage an hour earlier than usual.

They drove rapidly to the hospital, and while Miss Rosenthal was holding a consultation with the sister in charge of the clothing-room, Elfie hurried to the second floor and entered the ward where her patient lay.

Merely bowing to the nurses in attendance, she passed

swiftly up between the rows of beds, but paused suddenly beside that which sustained the wasted form of her lover, who seemed to be sleeping, or swooning, she could not tell which.

A great change had passed over the face and form of Albert Goldsborough since the day before. His face was more livid and sunken than ever; black shadows had gathered in the hollows of his eyes, and temples, and cheeks, and around his pallid lips, which, drawn tightly apart, showed the dry, glistening teeth between them. His eyes were half open and half opaque, like the eyes of the dying. His shrunken form, beneath the closely-clinging counterpane, revealed the rapid wasting of flesh and muscle that had gone on even in the last few hours.

As soon as Elfie's eyes fell upon him she suppressed the scream that rose to her mouth, and turned in agonized inquiry to her friend on the next cot.

"Oh, what has happened since last night?" she faltered.

"I am very sorry to tell you, miss, but, for some reason or other, the stump broke out bleeding in the night, and there was a very exhausting hemorrhage before it could be stopped again."

"And—is there—great danger?" faintly inquired Elfie, sinking upon the chair that stood between the two beds.

"Well—no, miss, we all hope not, if it doesn't break out again," answered the young soldier, hesitatingly.

"But—can it break out again? Is it likely to do so?" anxiously inquired Elfie, now gazing in distress upon the ghastly face of her lover, and now turning appealingly to her new friend.

"Well—perhaps not, miss," said the young soldier, painfully suppressing the truth to avoid wounding her.

Again Elfie's gaze was fixed upon the fallen face of her lover, who opened his eyes and recognized her with a wan smile.

"Thank you for coming, my love. I knew you would come to me. They told me, when I asked for you, that you came yesterday, but that they could not let you stay to see me. I knew that you would come again to-day, Elfie," he said, feebly holding out his hand to her.

"Oh, Albert, dear, my heart bleeds for you!" she cried, trying to keep back her rising tears.

"You know my fate, Elfie?"

"Oh, no, dear; none but the Omniscient can know that. But I feel sure, if you will only keep quiet and not let—that happen again you will get well. Come, Albert, I will not excite myself or you either. But I will not leave you again, dear. I will stay with you until—until you get well. See!" she said, drawing from her pocket the wedding ring that she had once indignantly torn from her finger, but still refrained from destroying. "See, I put on your ring—I put it on now of my own accord, willingly, gladly, so that I may stay and nurse you. See!"

"Elfie—darling! stop! mind what you are about! Do not compromise yourself! I may live!" said the almost dying man, laying his feeble hand on hers.

"Heaven grant that you may! But now see!" she said, slipping the ring firmly upon her finger and adding: "I will never leave you more, Albert, never, never!"

"Ah, my poor girl! I always knew you loved your 'traitor,' although you hated his treason!" exclaimed Goldsborough, feebly raising the ringed hand, and pressing it to his lips.

At that moment the surgeon, in making his rounds, came up to Goldsborough's bed. At a short distance he was followed by Miss Rosenthal and one of the nurses in close consultation.

While the surgeon was feeling the pulse of his patient Elfie was straining her ears to catch the words of the conversation between Miss Rosenthal and the nurse. At length, as they drew nearer, she heard the latter say:

"No, miss, the surgeon seems to think there is no hope in the world for his life. His death is but the question of a few days or hours."

Elfie knew that the hospital nurse was speaking of Albert Goldsborough, and, though from his appearance she might have been prepared, and perhaps was prepared, to hear such a sentence, yet for an instant her senses reeled and she caught the back of the chair for support.

Then with an effort she recovered her self-control and turned her eyes on the face of the assistant surgeon, who

was still examining his patient, and tried to read in its expression some reversal of the nurse's sentence.

But the surgeon's face was quite impassible.

Presently, however, he looked up and addressed Elfie.

"Young lady, I do not wish to be discourteous," he said very gently, "but my patient's condition demands the strictest quiet, and will not admit of his seeing visitors. Therefore, I must request you to retire."

For all answer Elfie deliberately arose and took off her gloves, mantle and bonnet and laid them on the empty chair. And then, while the surgeon was staring at her as if to see what she would do next, she answered, firmly:

"No, doctor, I cannot leave him. I must remain with him until—until he leaves the hospital."

"But, my dear young lady——"

"Say no more, doctor. I will not leave him. My place is by his side. I am his wife."

And, so saying, she came to the side of the cot and placed her hand in that of the dying man, who closed his wan fingers over it and raised his eyes, full of unspeakable love, to her pitying face.

In the utmost perplexity the surgeon turned toward Miss Rosenthal for an explanation.

"Yes, doctor," said Erminie, gravely and sweetly, "she has a right to stay with him. She is his wife."

CHAPTER XXIX.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

So Elfie was permitted to remain in the ward and nurse her husband. There was no provision in the hospital for extra nurses, and every woman who came to attend the sickbed of husband, son, or brother had to take the chance of catching a wink of sleep, or a mite of food, or drop of drink as best she could.

As Erminie was about to take leave of her friend she stooped and whispered:

"You do well to remain, dear Elfie, but there are no accommodations for you here, so I will send Bob back with such comforts as I think you will be most likely to

need, and I will also speak to Sister Agnes to let you have the use of her dormitory sometimes, and I hope your health will not suffer."

"Thanks! a thousand heartfelt thanks, dear Erminie, for all your kindness, and, above all, for the greatest kindness of not blaming me for this," said Elfie.

"My poor girl, I never shall dream of blaming you now," murmured Miss Rosenthal, turning away to conceal her emotion.

While they had been speaking Albert Goldsborough, with his hand clasped in Elfie's, had dropped into one of those light and fitful slumbers that attend the dying.

When Erminie had left her Elfie remained holding the hand of the sinking man until he awoke with a start, and, looking up at her with a smile, murmured, faintly:

"Yes, you are there. It is no dream. You are there."

"Yes, I am here, never to leave you again, Albert."

"But let me keep hold of your hand, so that if I drop asleep again I may know, even in my dreams, that I have you."

She gave him both her hands, caressing his, and looking on him with unspeakable tenderness.

"Elfie, my darling," he murmured, "when I look at you so, and think how I wronged you, it almost breaks my heart! I am sorry, I am sorry!"

"Albert, dear, don't look so! don't speak so! You have done me no wrong at all—none, none, I say. But if—if——"

"If what, Elfie?"

"Oh, if I could only hear you say—say——"

"Say what, my darling girl?"

"Say that—that you are sorry—sorry for taking up arms against your native land!" sobbed Elfie.

With a spasm of pain Goldsborough turned his face to the wall.

"Oh, Albert! I would give my life this day to hear you say that, and say it truly! Heaven knows I would! I would! my own love!" cried Elfie, sobbing as if her heart would burst; yet, knowing that such indulgence of emotion was wrong in herself and injurious to the wounded man, and trying hard to compose herself.

With difficulty Goldsborough turned his head and

shoulders, the half of his body that he could move, around toward her and faced her again.

"Elfie," he said, sadly and frankly, "if I were conscious of having done wrong I should be sorry for it now or never. 'A death-bed's a detector of the heart,' 'tis said. If the course you blame so bitterly had been a career of crime I should know it now, if ever, and I should atone for it by a death-bed repentance. And you, and all who think with you, would unite in approving and consoling the penitent. But when I speak my next words, Elfie, you and yours may harden your hearts against me. I cannot help that. For, Elfie, not to secure the good will of the people around me—not even to secure your sweet presence, which is the only earthly consolation I have now left in life—will I deceive myself, or you, or them. Listen, Elfie, and then leave me if you must. Here lying in the hospital, wounded and dying, and surrounded by the enemies of my country, and in danger of losing your love, I tell you I am not sorry for what I have done. I do not repent the course I have pursued. I know now, as I knew then, that I was and am right. There, Elfie. That is the faith in which I shall live and die. You, Elfie, think differently. And I do not blame you. The freedom of opinion that I claim for myself I give to all others. Now, then, my dearest, if your conscience commands you to leave me, leave me. And if you go I shall not reproach you, even in my thoughts. I shall thank you from the bottom of my heart for all past kindness; I shall love you as long as I live, and I shall bless you with my dying breath. Now go, my beloved, if indeed you must."

"Oh, Albert!" exclaimed Elfie, struggling to suppress her tears, " you know I will never leave you while you live. Never, Albert, never! I cannot convert you, but I cannot help loving you," she added, stooping and pressing her lips to his.

"My poor, dear girl, I wish we could think alike," he murmured, feebly caressing her head that lay so near his bosom.

"And now let us talk no more of this horrible war. Let us forget for a while the madness of the rebellion," said Elfie.

"Not just yet, my Elfie. I must justify myself in your eyes for your sake, if possible," he murmured.

"Oh, do not—do not! Oh, say no more! You are already too much excited. I was very wrong to have started the subject. I have raised your fever, and the doctor would serve me right to turn me out of the hospital," said Elfie.

"My dear girl, you have not excited me. Don't you see that I am past all that, Elfie? Besides, I must say more in self-justification. Only to you, Elfie. I would not stoop to justify myself to another," he proudly added.

"Go on, then, but don't—don't fatigue yourself."

"Listen, then, my darling girl. You and I are diametrically opposed to each other on the subject of this Civil War, are we not?"

"Yes, yes; more's the pity."

"So say I, 'More's the pity.' And yet, diametrically opposed as we are, we are each of us true to our firmest convictions of duty, are we not?"

"I truly believe so," admitted Elfie.

"And so far each of us is right. We are both right in adhering to what we conscientiously believe to be our duty."

Elfie was puzzled and silenced. Goldsborough went on, "We should either of us be very wrong to give up our honest convictions of duty merely to please the other."

Elfie was still perplexed and dumfounded.

"Listen, my darling. In the old days of intolerance religious persecution was the great madness. The one Christian sect that happened to be dominant persecuted all other Christian sects, and for the glory of God roasted them alive; and the other Christian sects, still for the glory of God, submitted to be roasted and hoped for the crown of martyrdom. But by and by the tables would be turned and the dominant sect would be down and some other sect would be up, and the persecutors would become the persecuted, and the roasters the roasted. And, again, whatever was done or suffered on either hand was for the sake of conscience and for the glory of God. Now, Elfie, in the face of such facts as history gives, when men so honestly differed in such mighty issues that they were ready to sacrifice each other and to yield up

their own lives, each in defense of his own peculiar convictions, what have you to say?"

"Why, that there are many wrong ways and but one right one, if we could only find it," said Elfie.

"Yes, if we could only find it," smiled Goldsborough, "but in the difficulty each must take the way he thinks to be the right way, and to him it will be the right way. Elfie, my darling, the days of intolerance are passing away. Religious intolerance is a thing of the past. Political intolerance and social intolerance will follow it into oblivion. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile, dear Albert, you are talking too much. Do not think it necessary to justify yourself to me. Let me stop all with this——" she said, stooping and pressing her lips to his. "I love you, Albert, I love you—I love you; that is the one thing I am surest of now. There, close your eyes and try to sleep, with my hand in yours and my face near yours," she murmured, dropping her head on the edge of his pillow.

He smiled, and with one hand clasped in hers and the other laid lightly among the black tresses of her bended head he closed his eyes and tried to rest.

He was in that state of physical decline when conversation is not exciting, but exhausting. He was very much exhausted and he slept.

Even in that crowded ward they were, from their position, nearly isolated. The cot was in the corner, with a window at each angle, and their nearest neighbor was the young Union soldier who had lost his leg. The boy, from a sense of politeness, had turned his back upon them, and was occupying his attention with a newspaper.

Elfie's patient slept, and Elfie never moved and scarcely breathed, lest she should disturb him.

How long the days in the hospital seemed! People came and went. A low hum of conversation prevailed.

Once Elfie was conscious that a consultation was going on by the bedside of a patient half-way down the row of beds on the opposite side of the ward. And soon after she heard a little bustle of preparation, and she saw a procession like a funeral train bearing that patient on his mattress on a bier from the ward to the operating-room.

The procession had to pass her to go out by the door at

her end of the ward. And as it went by she knew that another victim was about to lose a limb and perhaps his life also.

This victim never came back.

In an hour afterward Elfie learned from the nurses that he had died under the knife and had been taken to the dead-house.

The dinner hour for the patients came. And the beef tea, wine whey, chicken broth, milk punch, boiled rice, calf's-foot jelly and whatever else had been ordered or provided was served around.

It was sometime before Albert Goldsborough awoke, but when he did a choice was given him among all the delicacies furnished to the sick. He had no appetite, but was consumed by a great thirst. So he asked only for iced lemonade and got it.

Elfie raised his head while he drank it.

"That will do, my dearest," he said, drawing a deep breath of relief when he had drained the glass. "Only give me plenty of this and I shall do well. Cooling drink is the only material want I have left me," he added, smiling.

"You shall have a water cooler full of it set by the bed, so that I can draw it ice cold from the spigot whenever you like," said Elfie, as she laid his head back on the pillow.

"But you, my darling! What provision is there here for your comfort? How will you eat and drink? Where will you sleep?" he anxiously inquired.

"All right. Don't distress youself, Albert, Erminie will send me my meals. And Sister Agnes will give me the use of her room when I require it," answered Elfie.

Albert Goldsborough seemed very much refreshed by his long sleep and his cool drink, and now he was inclined to talk a little more.

"Elfie," he said, "if I die my widow will be one of the wealthiest women in Virginia."

"Dear Albert, you are a great deal better. You are not going to die. And if you were I know very well that wealth would never console your widow for your loss. But you will live, Albert. You will get over this and live."

"If I do live, Elfie, I will atone to you for all I have made you suffer. If I die I have the comfort of knowing that you will be very rich in this world's goods."

"Pray—pray don't talk so, dear."

"I must, Elfie! I must explain, while I can, my worldly position, that you may understand it and know how to proceed in the event of my death. Elfie, my uncle and aunt Goldsborough and their unhappy daughter, being all dead, and there being no other heirs, all the vast estates appertaining to the elder branch of the Goldsborough family fall to me as heir-at-law. The mansion in Richmond, the villa on the sea side and the plantation in the valley are all mine. The plantation house is in ruins, I believe, but the land is there, of course. And the rest of the property everywhere is intact; and, united to my own hereditary acres, make a vast estate."

"As if I cared for that! Oh, Albert, I only care to see you get well," she murmured.

"And I will get well to please you, if I can, Elfie. And, as I said before, if I live I will devote my life to your happiness. If I die I will leave you the wealthiest widow in Virginia. For, Elfie, listen, my dear—whichever party conquers you will be all right. If the Confederacy triumphs, as the widow of a Confederate officer, you will succeed to the half of my estate. If the Union triumphs, as the daughter of a Union officer and as an unquestionably loyal woman, you will still be allowed your widow's rights to the one-half of my estate, although the other half may be confiscated by the conquerors."

"Albert! Albert! if you will talk so I cannot help it, of course, but you distress me very much," wept Elfie.

"I have done, my dear girl. I will say no more. And, although you could not bear to hear my words just now, you will think of them in calmer moments and act on them in after days—or your father or friends will for you. Give me your hand once more, beloved, and I will try to sleep again."

Elfie gave him her hand and dropped her head on the pillow beside him, and again his exhausted frame sunk to rest.

On this occasion he slept longer than on the former one. And Elfie never moved and scarcely breathed until

she felt a hand laid lightly on her shoulder, and, looking up, saw Sister Agnes standing by her.

"Miss Rosenthal has sent your dinner and also a box of necessaries, which I have placed in my room. Will you come now?" whispered the sister.

Elfie shook her head and pointed to the sleeping man, whose hand still firmly clasped her own.

And just at that moment, as if the sleeper dreamed or divined that she was asked to leave him, he started and closed his fingers upon hers with a convulsive grip.

"You see?" whispered Elfie.

"I see. I will keep your dinner warm and come again after a while," said the sister, stealing softly away.

The hours crept slowly by and the afternoon waned toward evening.

At four o'clock the patients had their tea, but Albert did not awake.

At six o'clock the assistant-surgeons in charge of the wards made their rounds. These rounds were always attended with some little bustle, and the bustle always awoke nervous sleepers. It awoke Goldsborough.

"Here still, my guardian angel," he said, smiling gratefully on his watcher.

"Here always, Albert. What will you have now? The others had their tea two hours ago. You can have yours now, if you like."

"No, nothing so warm as tea. A draught of that delicious lemonade. I am so thirsty."

Elfie filled a glass from a pitcher of iced lemonade that she kept at hand, and then she lifted his head while he drank it.

"Ah, that is so refreshing," he said, with a sigh of pleasure, as she laid him gently back on his pillow.

At that moment the surgeon in charge and Sister Agnes came up together.

"Well, you are looking much better this afternoon. I think the presence of this lady is a great restorative," said the doctor, cheerfully, addressing Goldsborough.

"So great a restorative that it will save me if anything can," smiled Albert.

"Well, now, we must look at your leg. And we must ask the lady to retire while we do so."

Elfie hesitated, until Albert turned to her and said:

"Yes, darling, go. You need to be relieved from duty here for a little while, and now is your best opportunity. You shall return when they have done."

"Come with me," said Sister Agnes.

And Elfie stooped and kissed her husband, and then arose and followed the nurse.

"Oh, Sister Agnes," said Elfie, when they had left the ward, "you have experience; you can tell me; don't you think he is much better?"

"Yes, I certainly do," replied the Sister of Mercy, glad to be able to give the anxious young questioner some real encouragement.

"And—don't you think he will get well?" eagerly inquired Elfie.

"I think there are good grounds to hope so," answered the sister; "there is certainly a great change for the better in him since this morning."

"Sister Agnes, is there any particular danger that may threaten him, and can I guard against it in any way?"

"My dear, I will be frank with you. There is a possibility of another hemorrhage from his wound. You can guard against that by keeping him quiet and following the doctor's directions in all matters."

"Oh, I will be so careful," said Elfie.

And by this time they had reached the little refectory used by Sister Agnes and her companions, and where Elfie's dinner awaited her—a simple dinner of boiled chicken and mashed potatoes, rice pudding and green tea.

"I added the green tea, my dear, to keep you awake. I suppose you will want to watch to-night?"

"Oh, yes, yes! Many thanks for your kind thoughtfulness," said Elfie, earnestly.

When Elfie had finished her light repast, Sister Agnes took her to a small sleeping-room in the third story, containing two little white beds, two little washstands and two chairs—and having no other furniture.

"Sister Mary Joseph and myself sleep here. That is my bed by the window. I advise you to lie down on it and rest for an hour or two before you return to your patient. He will be well taken care of during your absence, never fear," said Sister Agnes.

"You are very good, but I would rather go back, when I have bathed my face and arranged my dress. Where is the box Miss Rosenthal sent me, please?"

"Here it is," said the Sister, drawing a medium-sized trunk from under the bed.

The key was tied to one of the handles, and Elfie untied it and opened the trunk. Erminie had sent her a soft gray merino wrapper, suitable for nursing, a soft pair of cloth slippers, a change of clothing and plenty of fresh pocket handkerchiefs and towels.

Elfie dressed herself in these comfortable habiliments, and then requested her guide to show her back to her ward.

"For I never could find the right way by myself, I am sure," she said.

The Sister complied with her request and attended her to the door of the ward, where she left her.

A few steps within the room Elfie met the assistant-surgeon, and stopped him to put the same questions she had already put to the Sister.

"He is much better, doctor, isn't he? He will recover, won't he?"

"We have good reason to hope so, madam," answered the surgeon.

"But I cannot get him to take any nourishment. He has no appetite; only a great thirst, and he will take nothing except lemonade," complained Elfie.

"Then do not force nourishment upon him. Give him the drink he craves," said the surgeon hurrying past her to attend to his other business.

Elfie went down between the two rows of little white beds until she came to the corner where Albert Goldsborough lay.

He was wide awake, and waiting for her. He seemed refreshed, and cheerful.

"I have been looking for you, my darling. The doctor has given me an opiate, and ordered me to go to sleep, as if one could go to sleep to order! I could not do so without your hand in mine. Sit by my bed, dear Elfie, and let me feel that you are there while I sink to rest," he said.

And Elfie took up her old position, with her hand clasped in his, and her cheek on the edge of his pillow.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT PEACE.

During Elfie's absence from the ward all the sick and wounded had been made as comfortable as circumstances would permit for the night. The greater number of them had been quieted by opium. And even those who could not sleep lay in benign repose, under the influence of that blessed but much abused "gift of God." Certainly, the great good of opium never was so realized and appreciated as in the military hospitals during the war.

Here, for instance, in this one ward, were as many as fifty patients, in every stage of wounds, fever and suffering; so nervous, so restless, so excitable, as not to be able to bear a ray of light, or a sound of noise; yet exposed to the bright flaring of the gasburners; to the irrepressible groans, tossings and complainings of their companions; and to the necessary movements of the doctors, nurses and assistants.

As Elfie sat beside her patient, and looked down along the lines of white beds, with their calm occupants, she thought that there was something of Heaven in the aspect of the scene.

While she so looked, she observed in the farthest corner of the room, near the last bed on the opposite side, a group gathered.

She saw that this group consisted of a surgeon, a chaplain and a nurse. Presently the chaplain knelt by the bed, and began to pray in a low tone, audible only to the patient on the bed, and the people who stood around it.

In a few minutes the chaplain arose, stood silently by the patient for a while, and then, with the surgeon, left the ward. And the nurse drew the sheet up over the face of the dead.

And though all passed so quietly, Elfie knew that a soldier's soul had departed.

Some twenty minutes passed away, and then four men came in at the lower door, with a bier, upon which they placed the mattress with the dead man, and carried him out.

And all this was accomplished silently, without disturbing the other patients in the ward.

The nurse, when her duties to the dead were done, came softly stepping up to Elfie's side.

"Some poor fellow has gone to his rest. Who was it?" inquired Elfie.

"Poor young Carnes, the boy in whom Miss Rosenthal was so much interested. We have been expecting his death for many days. And now he is gone. He passed away perfectly conscious and perfectly resigned. And he left his love, and his little pocket testament to Miss Rosenthal," said the nurse. And then she went her way to her other duties.

Tears stood in Elfie's eyes.

"And yet he is only one among thousands and thousands who have perished like him, in the flower of their youth. Oh, this war! this war!" she sighed.

Then she looked down upon her own patient. He was sleeping peacefully under the influence of the opiate.

The hours passed quietly on toward midnight. Elfie with her hand held prisoner the hand of her patient, and her head resting on the edge of his pillow, fell asleep.

The nurse passing softly on her rounds of inspection, paused to gaze on this scene, the poor mutilated man and his weary wife, both sleeping so peacefully, and so unconscious of the danger that was evident to the nurse's experience

"Poor things," she murmured, "let them sleep while they may."

Elfie slept several hours. When she awoke it was near day. She looked at her little watch and saw that it was four o'clock in the morning.

Her patient was still sleeping very calmly, although she had, on waking up, unconsciously drawn her hand from his.

"Oh, he is a great deal better! a great deal better! He will be sure to get well!" said Elfie, gazing with satisfaction and thankfulness upon the calmly sleeping face.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MARCH.

It was written of an old usurper of the throne of England, that "having gained the kingdom by fraud and by cruelty, he nevertheless governed it in justice and in mercy."

Something like the same policy prevailed in Colonel Goldsborough's conduct toward his captive bride.

Having gained her hand by force, he was willing to win her favor by forbearance.

No sooner had the curtain dropped behind the retreating form of Mutchison than Albert Goldsborough turned toward Elfie and sank upon one knee at her feet; and though the action was indeed rather melodramatic, I do not see, under the circumstances, how he could have done less than thus humble himself.

The insolent abductor was all at once turned into the pleading lover. He earnestly prayed her to pardon him.

"Elfie, my best beloved—my only beloved, you will try to forgive me for this violence!" he murmured, in a low and gentle tone.

"If I do, Albert Goldsborough, I pray that Heaven may never forgive me!" she answered, passionately.

"My darling Elfie, Heaven never records our wicked prayers. If it did we should all be doomed!" he said, gently taking her hand.

"Don't touch me, you wretch, unless you wish to drive me raving mad. I tell you I am on the brink of frenzy, now, and frenzy may give me strength to slay you!" she exclaimed, struggling and snatching her hand from his grasp.

"Elfie, listen to me!" he pleaded.

But Elfie drowned his murmuring voice in a torrent of bitter scorn and furious invective, which she poured upon him without stint or measure.

He let her scold until she had exhausted herself, and had to pause for want of breath; then he took advantage of her silence and answered, gently:

"Elfie, to all your cruel reproaches I have but this to say in my defense—I love you; I have loved you ever since I first saw you, and I believe that you love me. In this belief, Elfie, I could not leave you among the Yankees to be perverted by them, to be set against your own old State, your faithful friends, and your one true lover; I could not, my Elfie."

"You—ou! You—ou!" began Elfie, but she was too much out of breath to proceed, and so Albert resumed:

"I could not give you up to the Yankees, Elfie. I could not, my dear. And so, at the imminent risk not only of my own life, but of the lives of all my command, I crossed the river and brought you away."

"A great risk you ran, truly, to come with your two hundred armed guerrillas upon a harmless pleasure party of less than forty persons," passionately and scornfully cried Elfie, who had now recovered her voice.

"Yes, Elfie, it was a great risk—an imminent risk, as I said—for we crossed and landed between two forts whose scouts were out in search of us. And in three hours after our crossing, a squadron of cavalry, armed with their murderous six-shooters, were on our trail. But I would have risked much more than life for you, my Elfie."

"'Risk,' again," sneered Elfie. "I don't see it. The only risk that was run for my sake that day was run by the only man of our party; for I hold that little Mim was the only male creature that proved himself a man on that occasion."

"I wonder, now, if that little atom is my rival?" said Albert, musingly.

"Yes, he is!" exclaimed Elfie, spitefully catching at the idea; "he just is! I love and admire little Mim beyond everything. I love his little finger better than I ever did your whole person. He is a true hero, and I worship the very ground he walks on!"

"Very pleasant words for me to hear, Elfie."

"I don't care whether they are or not. They are true. I am dying in love with little Mim. And when I get back to Washington, I mean to ask him to marry me as soon as ever—— Oh, my good gracious, I can't either!" exclaimed Elfie, suddenly breaking off and bursting into

tears of rage at the recollection that she was married already to Goldsborough.

"No, you can't! Polygamy is not lawful in this land, at least not for ladies," laughed Albert Goldsborough.

"You will be hanged some day, shortly, and then I shall be a widow," sobbed Elfie.

"Come, come, my darling girl, why do you keep up this comedy? Do you think that I could be jealous of your little champion? Do you think that I believe for a moment in your professions either of regard for him or detestation for me? No, dear Elfie. I have a confidence in your love and faith that your words and actions cannot shake. Listen, my darling girl——"

"I don't want to hear a word you have to say, Albert Goldsborough."

"But, my dear, in common justice you must. Listen, Elfie—for we must march soon, and the time for explanation and defense is short. I have told you that, loving you beyond measure, and believing in your unaltered love for me, I could not leave you among the Yankees. I could not, Elfie. And so, at the imminent risk of my life, and the lives of all my band, I crossed the river and brought you off from between the very teeth of the enemy."

"You have bragged of all that before," sneered Elfie.

"I could not have believed in your persistent opposition to my wishes, Elfie; else, perhaps, I should have spared you and myself this trial."

"When you made the discovery, why did you not send me back to my friends?" demanded Elfie.

"It was too late even if it had been in other respects possible to do so! Once having run away with you, and above all having retained you for days in my custody, there was no retreat! The departure of Alberta this morning, leaving you alone, the only woman in the guerrilla camp, made your immediate marriage a necessity. And so, Elfie, I have married you, even by force; but I trust to win your forgiveness by forbearance. The deed is done, Elfie, that makes you my wife! But now that it is done, you shall be as sacred to me as my sister. And more so! for I will never touch your lips, or even take your hand again, without your leave! That you will for-

give me and love me I am sure—sure as that you are woman! We shall march in an hour, and of course you go with us! I will do everything I possibly can do for your happiness, except to give you up to the Yankees, to be taught to hate and despise your old State and old friends! You are a child of the South and belong to your mother, and must live among her children."

Elfie still sobbed, but now, as it seemed, with less of rage than of grief.

He was still at her feet.

"Get up!" she said at length, impatiently. "You've made a brute of yourself, but you needn't make a fool of yourself by remaining in that absurd position, Albert Goldsborough! Get up!"

"Not until I have obtained your forgiveness, Elfie. Oh, Elfie, dearest, I loved you so entirely. The thought of you was never for an instant absent from my mind, by day or by night, in the tent or in the field. Elfie, for the sake of the undivided love I bore you, forgive me; for the sake of the forbearance that I have sworn to observe toward you, and that will cost me so much, forgive me!" he pleaded.

"If you will—will keep your word with me, and treat—eat me as your sister, I will forgive—give you for the past!" sobbed Elfie.

"Heaven bless you for that much, darling! That is one step gained," he said, rising.

"And oh, if you had only been tru—true to your country in her trial! Oh, if you had only been tru—true to your country!" she wept.

"I was true to my country, Elfie. I am true to my country. I shall always be true to my country. Old Virginia is my country, and I am true as truth to her. I go with her where she goes—to destruction, if she should be cursed with failure, to dominion, if she should be crowned with success," replied the guerrilla leader, as he turned, lifted the curtain, and left the hut.

"Oh, if he'd been true! Oh, if he'd been true!" Elfie continued to sob.

Soon all was bustle in the guerrilla camp. The men were mustering and mounting, and preparing to move.

The guerrillas marched with very little baggage, as everybody knows. And so the band was soon ready.

In about half an hour after leaving the hut, Colonel Goldsborough returned to it, lifted the curtain, and once more presented himself before Elfie.

"My dearest girl, we are about to go down the mountain. The pass is a difficult and dangerous one, as you know—more dangerous still in the descent than in the ascent. And for your safety it is best that you should ride behind me, as you did before. Still keeping the spirit as well as the letter of my promise to you, Elfie, I must give you your choice of three modes of conveyance. You may ride behind me, or you may ride behind Parson Simmons, or you may ride on a sure-footed little mountain pony which is at your service."

"I will take the mountain pony, if you please," said Elfie.

"But will you feel quite safe to do so, down these perilous passes?"

"I am a mountain girl, if you will please to remember, and the horse, you say, is a mountain pony."

"Very well, Elfie, I will have it brought to the door of your hut," said Colonel Goldsborough, going out.

In five minutes he returned with the pony, and came in for Elfie.

Sulkily enough the girl went out with him.

Goldsborough's steed, the parson's cob, and Elfie's pony stood saddled and bridled before the hut.

The parson was there, also, apparently in charge of the three horses, whose bridles he held gathered in his hands.

The band, under the immediate charge of Mutchison, was now defiling through the narrow pass leading from the tableland down the side of the mountain.

Colonel Goldsborough, with his two captives, took the same direction. He rode on the right side of Elfie, while the preacher rode on the left, until they came to the narrow pass down which the line of mounted men was winding like some huge serpent.

Then Goldsborough ordered the preacher to precede Elfie, while he himself should follow her, thus forming a guard of honor immediately before and behind the captive bride.

In this manner they commenced the descent of the dangerous mountain pass.

Albert Goldsborough, in the spirit of his promise, forbore to force his conversation upon his companion.

Elfie rode on in sulky silence until her tongue was tired of keeping still, when she opened her mouth and spake:

"I thought the 'Devil's Dripping Pan,' or 'Soup Dish,' or whatever you call your horrid place up there on the mountain top, was to be the general rendezvous of your bands."

"We thought so, too, Elfie."

"And that you and Corsoni, with your commands, had met there to wait for the arrival of Monck and his men."

"Such was our plan."

"And here Corsoni moves with his command at midnight, and you march with yours at midday!"

"Just so, Elfie!"

"In truth, then, it seems to me that you gentlemen horse-thieves don't know your own minds any more than honester men."

"When a spy gets into our camps, Elfie, and discovers all our secrets, he is apt to defeat all our plans. That little devil of a Gill, who got into Corsoni's camp, not only betrayed his retreat to the enemy, but, as we have lately learned, he discovered and revealed the secret of this rendezvous. This made it necessary for us to choose another place of gathering, to which we are now going, Elfie. I don't mind telling you these things, my dear, since it is utterly impossible for you to betray us," said Albert.

And now, as the dangers of the road demanded all their attention, the conversation ceased.

"Thank Heaven it is over!" piously exclaimed the parson, as they found themselves safe at the entrance of a wooded valley.

There was no road, but, guided by a pocket compass, the band took their way westward through the forest, until, after marching for about three miles, they came out upon an open plain, dappled here and there with detached groves of trees and gradually ascending toward a range of wooded hills in the distance before them.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BATTLE.

"There is our new rendezvous," said Colonel Goldsborough, pointing to the distant range of wooded hills, where the autumn foliage was now glowing redly under the rays of the descending sun, and toward which the whole band was now moving leisurely.

But they had not marched more than a mile when Mutchison, who had been riding in advance of the whole line, came suddenly galloping back to the rear with every mark of hurry and excitement.

He drew rein beside his superior officer, and handed him a field-glass, saying hastily:

"Colonel, look there!"

"What is it?" inquired Goldsborough, raising the instrument to his eyes.

"There, at our rendezvous: the cloud of dust, the smoke, and hark! there is the sound of musketry! There must be a battle going on there, Colonel!"

"There is!" hurriedly exclaimed Goldsborough. "Mutchison, dash forward. Send half a dozen men back to guard the prisoners, who must remain here while we join the battle. Then get the band in order. Form on company front, and march! I will be with you as soon as I have provided for the safety of these!"

Mutchison wheeled his horse and galloped forward, carrying with him a cloud of dust, in which he soon disappeared.

Goldsborough looked around for a place of safety in which to bestow his captive bride and her clerical companion.

Nothing better offered than a grove of trees, in the midst of which sparkled a cool spring, now, however, rather choked with fallen autumn leaves.

He led his party there and requested them to dismount.

The poor parson very willingly obeyed, and got off the horse, of which he was heartily tired.

"I suppose there is nothing left now but to submit to

our fate and trust in Providence," said Elfie, as she also dismounted and seated herself upon a heap of dried leaves that the wind had drifted against the roots of a great oak tree.

"Yes, my dear young lady, that is it! We are in the power of the men of Belial, but the arm of the Lord is mighty to deliver us," murmured Mr. Simmons, when Colonel Goldsborough had passed out of hearing; he—Goldsborough—having taken the bridles of the two horses and led them to the other extremity of the grove, where he secured them to the trees.

"You see he has led away our horses so as to prevent us from taking advantage of the battle to escape by flight!" said Elfie, despondently.

"I see! I see, my dear young lady; but the arm of the Lord is strong to save. But, hush! Here comes the son of Beelzebub!" said the preacher, as the guerrilla leader returned.

And in a few minutes the near galloping of other horses was heard, and the six men sent back by Mutchison rode up, in a cloud of dust.

"Guard these two prisoners until further orders!" said Colonel Goldsborough, as he put spurs to his horse and dashed onward after his band.

He flew over the plain at a tremendous rate of speed, yet it was some ten minutes before he came up with his band.

They were now within half a mile of their rendezvous, where the black, heavy clouds of dust and smoke, and the continuous sound of firing, assured them that a fierce battle was going on.

On reaching his band, Colonel Goldsborough did but stop long enough to breathe his horse. And then he commanded a halt, and, raising his hand, cried out:

"Attention, my men! The rendezvous has been surprised by the enemy! The Free Sword seems hard beset! We must free him! To the rescue, then!"

A shout from the men responded to this speech.

"Attention! Forward! March!"

The guerrillas galloped as gayly onward toward the field of blood "as to a festival."

As they approached the scene of action the evidences of a fearful engagement encircled them.

Ascending the hill, they entered into a dense atmosphere of black and sulphurous smoke and dust through which sabres glanced and firearms blazed, and horses and riders loomed and vanished, and from which arose the confused sounds of shouts of men, the neighs of steeds, the clash of steel, the report of musketry, and the shrieks and groans of the wounded and the dying.

Over fallen steeds and writhing men—through flashing sabre strokes and whistling rifle shots—through smoke and dust—through blood and fire—the guerrillas dashed, striking here and there—striking wherever the blue coat of a Union soldier could be seen in the chaos.

It was a general *melée,* more terrible in its effects than any pitched battle could have been. It was a mutual massacre, in which no quarter was asked or given. Such was the engagement at —— Hill, long to be remembered in the bloody annals of the valley.

Neither Monck nor any of his officers or men were to be seen anywhere on the field. It seemed evident that his forces had not joined those of Colonel Corsoni, whose command had engaged the Federals alone.

In the thickest carnage might be seen the form of the Free Sword, an inspired form—a very Demon of Destruction—dealing death-blows right and left—striking everywhere, and always with fatal effects; struck at from every quarter, but always in vain! He seemed to bear a charmed life and to wield an invincible weapon.

And by his side—oh, sight of fear and horror!—by his side, in the fiercest of the fight, rode his devoted wife! Why was she there—why he permitted her to be there—no one could tell. Whether he had no wish or no power to withstand the force and fire of her will that clung to him so desperately for life or death, or whether they had been surprised too suddenly to be separated, is not known. All that is certainly known is that she was with him throughout that bloody day. She seemed to ride scathless through that scene of slaughter, unharming and unharmed! Who, indeed, would have willingly hurt her?

At the moment that Goldsborough with his band rode

up, the Free Sword and his two hundred faithful followers were fighting desperately against an overwhelming force.

Goldsborough brought to his relief nearly two hundred more men. Yet still the united forces of the two leaders numbered less than four hundred ill-armed and ill-disciplined guerrillas; and these were opposed to the whole regiment of Rosenthal's well-trained veteran cavalry, armed with their death-dealing Henry rifles—those sixteen-shooters, that augmented their fighting powers more than tenfold.

The guerrillas fought well, fearlessly, recklessly.

But who could doubt the issue?

Again and again the voice of the young Federal commander was heard above the din of battle, calling upon those brave, misguided men to surrender and save themselves.

In vain! He might as well have roared to the roaring winds!

The battle raged with increasing fury. The waves of war rolled east, rolled west, as the hard-pressed guerrillas fell back, or rallying for a space pushed forward.

At length, toward sunset, the guerrillas began to scatter and fly.

Colonel Goldsborough tried to rally them, but in vain. Their desperate courage had suddenly failed. Goldsborough looked around for the cause of this panic, and he discovered it in the absence of their idolized leader!

It was true. Neither the brave Free Sword nor his heroic wife could anywhere be seen on the field. The fiery spirit that had animated and inspired the whole band was gone. And fear had fallen upon his followers. And all who were not dead, wounded or prisoners were flying in all directions hotly pursued by the Federals.

Colonel Goldsborough, seeing that the day was lost, wheeled around, put spurs to his horse, and dashed down the hillside in the direction of the grove where he had left Elfie and the parson under guard.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FREE SWORD'S FATE.

Riding recklessly over the dead and dying, Albert Goldsborough rushed onward, until at the entrance of an old turnpike road he was arrested by a sight that might have stopped an army in its flight.

In the dust, on the ground, knelt Vittorio Corsoni, the terrible Free Sword, supporting in his arms the pale form of his beloved wife, and gazing down on her still face in unutterable anguish and despair. Beside him lay his hat and plume and his sword, cast off as though useless to him evermore.

"Dead!" exclaimed Albert Goldsborough, in horror and amazement.

The Free Sword did not reply or look up; he did not even seem to see or hear the man who addressed him.

The sound of approaching horses' feet startled Colonel Goldsborough from his trance of amazement.

"Corsoni! It is no use to sit there and be captured! Up and fly! All is lost!" he exclaimed, putting spurs to his horse and speeding away.

"Yes, all is lost!" murmured the Free Sword, without removing his eyes from the dead face over which he bent.

Another horseman came thundering up in a cloud of dust. It was Mutchison.

"Fly! fly, Colonel Corsoni! Rosenthal is within a hundred yards of you! And all is over!" shouted the giant, as he rushed past without drawing rein.

"Yes, all is over," muttered the Free Sword, dropping his face down to the cold face beneath him.

"Up and away! We are dead beat!" shouted another equestrian whirlwind that rushed past him.

"Dead beat!" echoed the Free Sword, mechanically.

Abershaw was the next who came. He hurriedly dashed up, threw himself from his saddle, and led his horse up to his chief, hastily exclaiming:

"Colonel Corsoni! For Heaven's sake, fly! There is

not a moment to be lost! Rosenthal is a few yards behind! Here! I have brought you a fresh horse! Mount and away! Save yourself!"

The Free Sword lifted his despairing eyes to the face of his faithful follower and pointed in silence to the still form in his arms.

"Madam Corsoni fainted! No wonder, poor lady! Well, I will stay and take care of her. It does not matter so much if I am captured; I shall be treated as a prisoner of war. But you, colonel! Oh, you know the doom that awaits you if you are taken! Mount my horse! Fly and save yourself!"

"Save myself! From what? The worst has happened that could possibly befall me. Oh, Abershaw, look here! and tell me if my life is worth the saving now!" cried Corsoni, in a heart-broken voice, as he pointed to the dead face of his wife.

"Dead! killed! Oh, Heaven, how did that happen?" exclaimed Abershaw, overwhelmed by the sight.

"A minie ball. She saw the murderous rifle aimed, and threw herself before me, and received in her heart the shot that was intended for my bosom!" said Corsoni, in a voice of such deep despair that his follower groaned aloud.

But time pressed, pressed fearfully; a life hung on every minute! And Abershaw could not leave his chief to indulge in sorrow.

"My colonel—my brave Free Sword!" he exclaimed, "rouse yourself! A soldier should not yield to grief any more than to fear."

Corsoni sadly shook his head.

"Come, come, my chief, look up. Think of all your glorious achievements in the cause of the young Confederacy——"

"It was for her—for her, and she is gone," moaned Corsoni.

"Then up and avenge her! Think of all that you have already done, of all that you may still do for the cause. Think what a career opens before you. When the Confederacy triumphs——"

"The Confederacy," said the Free Sword, bitterly. "What do you suppose I really cared for the Confeder-

acy? I am a foreigner. What are your civil wars to me? It was for her I drew my sword. She bade me draw it in the cause of the Confederacy, and I did it, as, if she had bid me to draw it in the cause of the Union, or of the Lord, or of the devil, I would have done it. It was for her! for her! and now she is gone!—oh, my pale love! This was not what I took you from your convent for," he added, gazing with infinite sorrow on the still face.

Then he turned to his follower, saying:

"But go and save yourself, Abershaw. You have yet something to live for."

"No, I shall stay with you and—her," firmly replied the man.

Even as Abershaw spoke their pursuers dashed up.

"Ah, here you are, you demon! Yield!" thundered the foremost soldier, dismounting.

"I yield" gently replied the Free Sword.

Colonel Rosenthal rode up, attended by his staff, among whom was Wing—Wing, his adjutant.

"You are a prisoner, Colonel Corsoni. Deliver up your sword," said Justin, gravely, as he dismounted. "My God!"

This last exclamation was struck from his lips by the sight of Alberta's dead body in the arms of her heart-broken husband.

And the most inveterate pursuers of the Free Sword were now gathered around him with looks of pity in their war-worn faces.

Colonel Rosenthal lifted his hand, and silently waved these men away.

And all retired except Adjutant Wing.

"I am very sorry for this, Corsoni, very, very sorry," said Justin compassionately.

The Free Sword looked up. His youthful face seemed suddenly to have grown old and haggard with unutterable woe. Then he gently laid down the form of his wife and struggled to his feet, and put his hand to his side for the sword that was no longer there. He looked about to find and deliver it to his captor. As he did so, the blood suddenly gushed in torrents from an unsuspected wound in his breast, and his face became livid.

"You are hurt, Corsoni," said Justin, in a pitiful voice.
"Am I? I didn't know," answered the Free Sword, as he reeled and fell beside the body of his wife—dead.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

Adjutant Wing knelt down beside the dead and took two fresh white pocket handkerchiefs from his bosom—Adjutant Wing was rather dainty for a soldier, in some of his habits, and constantly exposed himself to the raillery of his companions by his weakness for clean linen. He now covered with the handkerchiefs the poor dead faces, and, still kneeling, gazed upon the two bodies, while great tears rolled slowly down his cheeks.

"You are weeping, Wing," said Colonel Rosenthal, kindly.

"I cannot—cannot help it," said the boy, sobbing aloud. "When I look at these two, and remember that they were kind to me, and that I betrayed them to their death, I cannot help it. Oh, my colonel, I have shed some bitter tears in my life. But these are the bitterest that ever fell from my eyes!"

"Wing, what you did was done as a sacred duty in the service of your country."

"Yes, I know; but the duty was very revolting to me. Once I said that nothing on earth could ever induce me to become a spy; but that was before the war, and I was in no condition to judge of the matter."

As Wing sobbed forth these words Colonel Rosenthal started and looked at him wistfully for a minute; then, seemingly satisfied by the scrutiny, he said:

"Our military duties are often revolting to us, my boy; but still they are duties—sacred duties—and must be performed. I suppose the judge who pronounces a sentence of death, and the sheriff who executes it, both feel their duty to be a painful one; but they do it. I am sorry for these people, Wing—very, very sorry for them; but they were traitors."

"Oh, call them no hard names over their still, cold

bodies, my colonel. Their lips are mute and cannot reply. They thought they were right, and so thinking, they were true to themselves, and true, oh Heaven, how true to each other! Theirs was a rare love, my colonel; stronger than life and death!" wept Wing.

At that moment the sound of many horses' feet was heard approaching, and presently a squad of Union cavalry rode up, having Albert Goldsborough, Abershaw, Haddycraff and other guerrilla officers as prisoners.

"We cut off their retreat, sir," reported the officer in command of the party.

Colonel Rosenthal advanced to receive the sword of the guerrilla leader.

Goldsborough handed it over in perfect silence. There was not a word spoken between the two.

Then Colonel Rosenthal ordered the prisoners taken to the rear and guarded.

Next he beckoned an officer, and directed him to take charge of the remains of the Free Sword and his unfortunate wife, and to see to their removal, and their preparation for decent interment.

Finally, he called Wing and Hay (who had succeeded in making his escape from Monck's camp) to attend him, and rode off to inspect in person a certain locality in the neighborhood where he proposed that his regiment should bivouac for the night.

They followed the old turnpike road down the hill, until they came to the open plain, across which Goldsborough's men had marched that day.

Straight before them, under the dark eastern horizon, was dimly seen a grove, or piece of woods.

"There is the place where we shall halt to-night, Wing. As we have no tents, the trees must give us shelter. And I am told that there is a fine spring of water. Our tired and hungry men will be comfortable," said Colonel Rosenthal, pointing to the grove.

"And the wounded, my colonel?" inquired Wing, gently.

"You always remember the wounded, my boy. Well, they will be taken care of. Captain Hopkins and Surgeon Sharpe are in charge of the wounded. And lest you should also think the dead may be neglected, I will

inform you that Lieutenant Barnwell and Chaplain Jones are intrusted with the arrangements for their Christian burial. Are you satisfied now, Wing?"

"Thanks, my colonel, for your information, and also for your kind indulgence of what might be called impertinence in me," said Wing, respectfully raising his cap.

Colonel Rosenthal smiled wistfully, but did not reply.

The sun had long set, and the moon had not yet risen. But it was a clear, bright, starlight night, and they continued their way across the plain, strangely soothed by the sweet stillness and peacefulness of the scene.

They rode along, drawing nearer and nearer to the grove, until at length, when they were within a few hundred yards of it, they were startled by screams issuing from its shadows, a woman's piercing screams, mingled with cries of:

"Murder! Murder! Help! Help!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ELFIE IN THE GROVE.

"Quick, boys! There is something dreadful going on in that grove! Some woman in extreme peril!" hastily exclaimed Justin Rosenthal, as he put spurs to his horse, and galloped forward, hotly followed by Wing and Hay.

The grove, at the point at which they approached it, was too thickly grown to admit the entrance of their horses.

So Colonel Rosenthal threw himself from his saddle, fastened his horse to a tree, drew his sword and plunged into the ticket.

This example was quickly followed by his companions.

The cries of distress had ceased; and the silence and the darkness of the place rendered it rather difficult for our Don Quixote to decide where to turn his steps and the point of his sword for the delivery of the distressed damsel.

"We must scatter ourselves, boys! Each must take a different direction and beat about the woods until we

discover the cause of those cries! And he who first comes upon the scene of violence must shout for the others! Now go! And may Heaven grant that we may be in time!" hastily exclaimed Justin, waving his sword in the directions he wished the others to take, and then turning and striking deeper into the shadows of the grove.

It was very still and dark. Nothing could be seen but the occasional glance of a star peeping down between the upper branches of the trees; and nothing could be heard but the ripple of a stream, hidden somewhere in the deep, dry undergrowth of the thicket.

Justin was completely bewildered, knowing not which way to turn.

"The unfortunate woman, whoever she is, must be murdered or worse before this! At all events, she is silenced," he said to himself.

At that moment another cry arose; but this time it was a man's voice—weak, quavering, cracked—but unmistakably a man's voice, crying:

"Help! Murder! Help! Oh, all good Christians, help!"

"Gracious Heaven! Has the woman got the better now, and is she killing the man; or what is the meaning of this second outcry?" exclaimed the colonel, in droll perplexity.

And, guided by the cries, he clutched his sword with a firmer clasp, and strode on in the direction from which they came. He had not gone many yards before the cries arose for the third time; and now, as in the first instance, it was the woman's voice, screaming:

"Murder! Murder! Help! Help!"

"This is very perplexing. Apparently there are two of them in distress, and they take turns in yelling," said Justin, as he rushed on toward the scene of action.

Suddenly he came upon it. Striking through the thicket, he entered an opening in the grove where the clear bright starlight shone down upon a strange picture—a man, and a woman, each bound to a tree, only a few yards from each other.

"Help! Murder! Help!" shrieked the man.

"Don't come near me, you monster! I have a re-

volver concealed in my bosom and I will shoot you as soon as I would a mad dog!" screamed the woman.

"Elfie!" exclaimed Justin Rosenthal, in astonishment, advancing toward her.

"Oh, Justin, dear! Justin, is it you? Thank Heaven. But I took you for a prowling guerrilla!" cried Elfie, struggling to free herself enough to welcome him.

"I was drawn here by your cries for help, Elfie. But who had the insolence and barbarity to treat you in this manner?" demanded Colonel Rosenthal, as with his sword he severed the cords that bound the girl and set her free.

"Let me sit down and breathe, and then I'll tell you all about it," said Elfie, with a sigh of relief, as she sank down on a heap of dry leaves at the foot of the tree.

Justin stood looking at her with eyes full of doubt, pity and anxiety.

"Don't stand staring at me as if I had two heads, man! Go and set the parson free. He is a Christian hero, he is! and by that time I shall recover my breath and be able to talk to you," said Elfie, with something of her old snappishness. And truly the poor girl had had enough to make her feel cross and nervous.

"I beg your pardon, Elfie," said Justin, smiling, as he turned to obey her.

He cut the cords that bound the minister, who immediately stretched his arms, and then dropped upon the ground with a fervent:

"Thank goodness!"

At that moment Wing and Hay came up from different points. On seeing Elfie, Wing started and withdrew a little into the shade.

Justin went up to him and said:

"I suppose you were led here by the cries, as I was?"

"Yes, sir; they resounded through every part of the grove, I assure you."

"Well, I hope there has been no great harm done. We found a parson and the young lady whom you met as a captive among the guerrillas, bound here to a couple of trees. I do not quite understand the affair yet; but they are apparently uninjured. Now go, Wing—take Hay with you, and ride back to the field. Tell Lieuten-

ant-Colonel Wedgewood that we shall encamp in and around the grove to-night. Tell him to send all the men here who are not engaged in looking after the wounded and the dead, or in guarding the prisoners."

Wing bowed, beckoned Hay to follow him and left the scene.

Justin turned and seated himself on a fragment of rock near the bank of leaves on which Elfie rested.

"I am very glad, Elfie, to find you safe at last," he said, a little dubiously.

"Yes, thank Heaven, I have passed safely through the terrible days of my captivity," said Elfie.

"I can answer for that. The men of Belial, bad as they were, didn't dare to harm a hair of her head. From their chief downward, they all treated her with respect," said the preacher.

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Simmons. I don't need that you should indorse me. I have little reason to be grateful to you, goodness knows, for saving your life at the expense of my liberty," snapped Elfie.

The preacher bowed his head under this rebuke. And Justin Rosenthal looked from one to the other in perplexity.

"I will explain, Justin; but it is a long story, I can tell you. I have been through a campaign since I saw you last," said Elfie.

"But before you begin, my dear young lady, let me ask the captain here a question. Sir, might you have a morsel to eat or drink about you?" piteously inquired the poor, consumptive preacher.

"No, I mightn't, I am sorry to say," smiled Justin.

"You see, we haven't broken our fast since the morning. And I feel a sort of inward sinking. And if you had a scrap of hard tack or a drop of old rye——"

"I regret very much that I have nothing of the sort. You know that we cavalry rangers, out after guerrillas, carry no provisions. We look to live on the country," said Colonel Rosenthal.

The poor preacher laid his thin hands over his empty bread-basket, and groaned aloud. Even Elfie pitied him.

"Never mind, Mr. Simmons," she said, "you heard the order given by Colonel Rosenthal. The men will be

here presently, and you may depend they will not come empty-handed. We shall have a sumptuous supper presently."

With this piece of comfort the preacher tried to content himself.

"And now, Elfie," said Justin Rosenthal.

"Well, I suppose you heard that our picnic party was surprised by the guerrillas, and that I was carried off?"

"Yes, I heard of that, Elfie, through a spy I sent into the camp of the Free Sword. Tell me, my dear little freind, what happened after the spy had left," said Justin.

And Elfie began and related in detail all her adventures while a captive among the guerrillas. She told the story with firmness, and even with humor, until she came to describe her forced marriage, when she suddenly burst into tears of rage and shame, and wept and sobbed as if her heart would break.

When Justin had heard the whole story of the marriage, he laid his hand upon Elfie's bowed black head in a protecting and reassuring manner, and laughed as he said:

"Why, Elfie, the marriage is not binding upon you, unless you choose to make it so by yourself acknowledging its validity. If you protest against it as a forced marriage, and bring this clergyman here as your witness, it cannot hold good."

"But there was a li—license, and a ring—ring, and an ordain—dained minister, and even a man—man to give me away, and all was reg—reg—reg—regular!" answered Elfie, scarcely able to articulate through her gasping sobs.

"Nonsense, my dear girl! The vital, valid, lawful part of the affair, without which all the rest was all invalid, null and void, was wanting," laughed Justin.

"And what was that—at?" sobbed Elfie.

"The consent of the woman, of course!"

"Oh, but they had that."

"Elfie!"

"They took it by force, as they took me. That man—an—who acted as my pap—pap—papa, took me by the neck and hair had bobbed my head down three or four

times in the most positive manner, as if he meant me to say, 'Yes, yes, yes!' and the ceremony went on."

"The villain! But, Elfie, my dear, that was no consent. Nonsense, my child! You are no more bound in law or gospel to your guerrilla abductor than you are to any other savage you can think of. Give yourself no uneasiness on that subject, Miss Fielding," said Justin, with an intentional emphasis on Elfie's maiden name.

Apparently Elfie was not grateful for the consideration.

"Justin Rosenthal, I'll thank you not to call me 'Miss Fielding!' How do I know but what I am Mrs. Goldsborough? I hate to be placed in an equivocal position, and I won't be, neither; there! Call me Elfie. The name given me in baptism is the only one either you or I can feel dead sure I am entitled to bear!" exclaimed the girl, passionately.

"Very well, my child. Just as you please!" laughed Justin, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Elfie pouted so long in silence that Justin found it necessary to recall her to her narrative.

"Come, Elfie," he said, "tell me how you and your companion in captivity happened to be bound to these trees?"

"You know," answered Elfie, "I told you how when Albert Goldsborough found that a battle was in progress on the hill, he made us dismount, and took away our horses, and set a mounted guard of six guerrillas to watch us."

"Yes."

"Well, they watched us closely enough for a while. I couldn't stir, even to walk about and stretch my cramped limbs, without being threatened with a rifle leveled at me!

"And all that time we heard the firing in the distance, and knew that a great battle was going on between the guerrillas and our own troops. And we prayed heartily for the success of our men."

"Your prayers were heard, Elfie."

"Of course, we could not guess which way the tide of victory would turn. We could only see the clouds upon clouds of black and sulphurous smoke rolling over the hill, and hear the continual firing, and smell the suffo-

cating fumes of gunpowder that were overpowering even at this distance."

"That was because the wind blew straight from the hill in this direction."

"In this way several hours passed, and then we began to hear the thunder of flying horsemen crossing the plain. And one of our guard rode out to reconnoitre, and came back in a hurry, exclaiming:

"'By the devil! if the clock peddlers haven't beaten us! Our men are flying as fast as their horses can carry them before the Yankee cavalry! I am not a-going to stay here guarding a girl and a parson until I am captured! What do you say, boys?'

"Apparently the 'boys' agreed with their companion. They rode together and consulted in a low voice and in great excitement, while we still felt, as it seemed, the very earth shake with the thunder of the flying and chasing horsemen. Meanwhile I felt great hopes of being allowed to escape. My hopes were soon destroyed, however, by the words of the corporal, who had command of the guard.

"'It will never do to let them get off, blast them! any more than it will do for us to stay here and be captured by the Yankees! I'll tell you what, boys! we will tie them to trees, so that if the colonel does come back to look for them—which I doubt very much if he will, even if he should have escaped being killed or wounded, or taken prisoner—he will find them; that's all! Now, what do you say to that?'

"The corporal's proposal was adopted by acclamation. And the wretches immediately seized us and bound us, each to a tree, as you found us, Justin. And then they mounted their horses and galloped away, and we saw no more of them."

"Nor of any others?"

"No! we remained here, while the night grew darker and darker. We still occasionally felt the earth shake under the thunder of the flying and following horsemen, but no one entered the grove. After a while even that noise ceased."

"Were you frightened, Elfie?"

"Not until a wolf or some other wild animal came up

and stood before me, and looked up in my face with his fiery eyes, as if he were balancing the question whether he should eat me then, or take his supper a few minutes later. I felt my flesh creep and my blood grow cold then, Justin! And I screamed with all my might. And the creature took to its heels and ran away!"

"Poor Elfie!"

"After that Mr. Simmons and I, thinking that some of our men might be about, took our turns in crying, 'Help' and 'Murder.' And at last, just as our lungs were giving out, you came to our relief, Justin."

"And that is all!"

"Yes, except this, Justin! In the midst of our own personal distress, we still remembered to thank Heaven for giving us the victory!"

As Elfie spoke, the sound of an approaching troop of horses was heard. And soon they seemed to have drawn up on the outskirts of the grove.

Wing came to report to his colonel.

"The regiment has arrived on the ground, sir. Also the army wagons with the commissary stores that were sent after us from W. Lieutenant-Colonel Wedgewood has dispatched messengers to hurry up the ambulances for the transportation of the wounded, who are now receiving all the attention that it is possible to bestow upon them in their present position. To-morrow I hope to be able to submit to you a correct report of the killed, wounded and prisoners."

"Quite right, adjutant," said Colonel Rosenthal. Then, changing his tone a little, he continued: "And now, Wing, I think you had better remain here with this young lady and the preacher, while I go to take a look at my poor fellows."

And with a bow to Elfie and her companion, Justin Rosenthal walked away from them.

Now all was cheerful bustle in and around the grove.

The men dismounted, took their saddles from their horses, and secured the weary beasts to the trees on the outer edge of the grove.

Then they began active preparations for refreshment and rest. They unloaded the army wagons, and every

man watered and foddered his horse before thinking of himself.

Then some went to work kindling fires to cook by; others began preparing food; others again busied themselves with building rude shelters of boughs to protect them from the night air.

By the orders of Colonel Rosenthal, a party of the men went to that part of the grove where Elfie and her companions were waiting, and there, under the immediate direction of Adjutant Wing, they constructed a comfortable hut of cedar boughs for Elfie's accommodation.

And soon in front of this hut a good supper was served of strong coffee, with white sugar and condensed milk, and broiled ham, with fried potatoes, and loaf bread and camp biscuits.

Elfie, Mr. Simmons, Colonel Rosenthal and Wing sat down to this supper. And though every one of them played well their parts, the poor, consumptive preacher excelled them all in gastronomic feats.

During the meal, which was eaten by torch light, strange glances were observed to pass between Elfie and Wing. From time to time Elfie looked furtively at the young adjutant, who sedulously avoided her glances. But at length, when Wing surprised Elfie gazing steadily at him, he opened his dark eyes to their widest extent and favored her with a stare of astonishment that at once put an end to the play.

After supper Elfie retired to her hut, where, upon a bed of leaves, she slept comfortably, guarded on one side of her dwelling by the old minister, and on the other side by the young adjutant.

As Elfie evinced the utmost impatience to return home, and as Colonel Rosenthal was anxious to be rid of all encumbrances, so that he might immediately go after Monck, he next morning sent Miss Fielding under a guard of honor, commanded by Adjutant Wing, to the Point of Rocks, from which she was to take the evening express to Washington.

CHAPTER XXV.

ELFIE'S RETURN.

It was nearly ten o'clock when the train steamed into the station. Elfie got out on the platform. As she had no luggage to look after nor even a parasol nor a hand-bag to encumber her, she quickly made her way to the street, where omnibus drivers and cabmen were cracking their whips and vociferating their routes, and where porters were quarreling over their loads, and policemen adding much to the general noise and confusion.

Elfie had not been robbed by the guerrillas, and she had still in her pocket a little portmonnie, well filled with "greenbacks" and "fractional currency," that her father had given her some weeks before, when he had gone to join his regiment. So she called a carriage, taking care to pass by all those with yelling drivers, and to select one in charge of a well-conducted coachman.

"Where to, miss?" inquired the latter, touching his hat, after he had assisted Miss Fielding into her seat.

Elfie gave him the direction. The man got upon his box. And the carriage was driven off toward the parsonage.

Arrived there, she eagerly looked out to see if there were any external signs by which she could guess whether the household had retired for the night.

"All right! I see the lights gleaming through the library shutters, and I know by them Erminie is still up," she said to herself, as the carriage stopped and the coachman got down and opened the door.

"Here is the dollar agreed upon for your fare! And here is half a dollar extra to reward you for not roaring at travelers like the other hackmen did!" said Elfie, as she quickly thrust the money into the man's hand and opened the gate.

As the carriage drove off again she ran up the walk leading from the gate to the front door of the house. And when she reached it she seized the bell-pull and rang a peal like a fire-alarm.

The door was opened by Uncle Bob, who, on seeing his young mistress, jumped a yard backward, exclaiming:

"Praise the Lord, Miss Elfie! is this you?"

"Yes, yes! Where is Erminie?" cried Elfie, and without waiting for an answer she rushed past the old man, tore open the library door, and bounced in upon the young mistress of the mansion.

Erminie, looking like some fair spirit of peace, sat in her deep arm-chair by the library table, reading by the light of a shaded gas-burner.

On raising her eyes to see who it was who rushed into her presence so rudely, and recognizing Elfie, she laid down her book and arose and opened her arms, and folded the wild girl fondly to her bosom, while her tears fell warmly on the little black head.

"Thank Heaven for your safe return! Oh, Elfie, my dear, I am so happy to have you back again!" said Erminie, gently releasing Elfie, and placing her in the easiest resting-chair.

"I was half afraid to come upon you so suddenly, Erminie, dear. I was afraid I should shock you. But, indeed, indeed, I had not self-denial enough to go to a hotel and stop all night, and wait until I could send for Dr. Sales to break the news to you."

"I am very glad you came at once to the house, my dear. The other proceeding would have been highly improper in a young lady, traveling alone, in a city full of soldiers," said Erminie.

"'Full of soldiers!' fiddle-de-dee! I have been marching and counter-marching, fighting and flying, among soldiers and guerrillas, for the last ten days! So I have no reason to be frightened at them. But I am glad I didn't startle you by pouncing in upon you so unexpectedly."

"You startled me a little, dear; but it was with a very pleasant shock."

"And, oh! I was so impatient to see you, and to hear from my brave little Mim. Oh, Erminie, can you tell me about my little Mim?" anxiously inquired Elfie.

"He is quite out of danger, and is getting well fast."

"Thank Heaven for that. I should never have got

over his death if he had died, the dear little hero! But—he was in danger?"

"Oh, yes. However, that is quite past. I saw him this morning. I went to see him every day, for your sake, Elfie."

"Heaven bless you for that, dear! Erminie, were you very anxious about me when I didn't get home that night?"

"I was uneasy," replied the Lutheran minister's daughter, who was by no means "gushing," and never exaggerated her emotions. "I was uneasy, but I thought you must have decided to prolong your excursion, and I knew you were with a large party, well able to protect you."

"Umph—umph!" said Elfie, who was slightly disappointed in not having created a greater sensation. "Umph—umph! But next day, when the excursionists got back, bringing little Mim with his skull fractured, and the news that I had been carried off by guerrillas! How then, Erminie?"

"I was very much shocked, and very anxious at first; and I called on some of the ladies to learn the facts. And when I discovered that it was your cousin and old adorer, Albert Goldsborough, who had carried you off, I felt reassured."

"Upon what ground, if one might inquire?" demanded Elfie, rather piqued at her friend's self-possession.

"Upon that of a certainty that Albert Goldsborough would allow no injury to be done you. I foresaw that he would detain you in a sort of honorable captivity for a while, and use all his influence and eloquence to induce or persuade you to marry him; and that when he should fail to do so, he would send you back to your home, as he has apparently done."

"Indeed! Well, you have a good deal to learn from me yet, Erminie," said Elfie.

"You shall tell me all your experience since you left me, dear, but not until you have had rest and refreshment. My curiosity can wait," said Miss Rosenthal, touching the bell.

An hour later than this, at about eleven o'clock in the night, Elfie, thoroughly refreshed with a warm bath and fresh clothing, and wrapped in a white merino dressing

gown, and with her feet thrust into white fur slippers, sat in an easy-chair before the bright little wood fire in Erminie's bed-room.

Erminie sat opposite to her, and between them stood a stand with a little *téte-â-téte* silver and porcelain tea-service.

And while she took her tea, which Erminie shared for sociability sake, Elfie related her adventures among the guerrillas.

"I have so much to tell you, Erminie, dear, that indeed I do not know where to begin. But first tell me: Have you heard from your brother or from Britomarte lately?"

"They—they are safe?" gasped Erminie, in sudden, deadly fear.

"They are both safe at this present moment. At least it is fair to presume that they are, for your brother was alive and well at seven o'clock this morning; and Britomarte was alive and well at seven o'clock this evening."

"You saw them? You saw them both? My brother and—Britomarte?" anxiously inquired Erminie.

"Now, I didn't say all that. I said they were alive and well at the times stated. I will add that they were at liberty, in good spirits, and in no sort of danger," said Elfie.

"You speak of them as if they were together—are they?"

"I spoke in no such manner. Nor I did not mean to do so. Together, indeed! That's likely. But you haven't answered my question yet. You haven't told me when you heard from your brother and from your friend."

"I got a letter from my dear Justin little more than a week ago. He had just been appointed to the command of a regiment of cavalry on duty at W. And he was about to start for that place immediately. His letter was post-marked H."

"Yes; well, I believe he is still in command of that regiment. But now as to Britomarte. When did you hear from her?"

"About a fortnight ago. A letter postmarked Baltimore reached me, merely saying that she was well, an-

She bathed her own eyes and temples from a little pocket flagon of cologne water to wake herself up more effectually, and then she sat cheerfully watching for the dawn, and frequently looking down upon the face of her patient.

An hour more had passed when, looking upon Goldsborough's face, she fancied that it had changed, and grown paler and more sunken. While gazing intently, to be sure she was right, she became sensible of a sound of dull, soft trickling and dropping. Thinking of nothing but that her jug might be leaking and her lemonade wasting she hastily arose to examine; and her eyes fell upon a sight that made her senses reel; beside the bed was a crimson pool formed from a stream of blood that trickled and dropped from under the counterpane.

In an instant Elfie knew what had happened. The hemorrhage had broken out again, and the patient was fast bleeding to death in his opium sleep.

Suppressing the scream that arose to her lips, Elfie flew noiselessly down the ward to the spot where the nurses and night-watchers sat, and breathlessly told them of the fatality.

One of the nurses hastened out to fetch a surgeon, and the other accompanied Elfie back to her patient.

The woman immediately uncovered the stump of the mutilated limb, and placing her hand to the lips of the wound, pressed them together to stop the hemorrhage until the surgeon should arrive.

The action awoke the sleeper. He gasped for breath and stared around him in bewilderment.

Elfie was already by his side, with her hand in his. But his feeble hand had no longer the power to close on hers.

He was dying fast.

"What—has—happened?" he panted, turning his eyes, wild with the approaching struggle, up to the face of Elfie.

"My love, my love, it is only your wound bleeding a little. We will stop it soon," she replied, in a low and soothing tone, repressing all exhibition of the despair that was nearly breaking her heart.

"I—I am dying, Elfie! Pray—pray—for me, darling," he gasped.

Elfie sank on her knees, and spreading her arms over him, prayed fervently:

"Oh, Heavenly Father, forgive him, forgive, and receive him and bless him, for our Saviour's sake," she cried over and over again, in the earnestness of her supplication.

"Amen, amen," he breathed, at every interval of her prayer.

"Oh, my love, my love! Christ will atone to God for all your sins. And I—I will do all I can to atone to man!" wept Elfie, as she arose from her knees.

The surgeon came hurrying to the scene. But a single glance at the dying man assured him that all his own medical skill, all the world's medical skill would never succeed in saving him now.

Albert Goldsborough turned his fading eyes on his wife, and feebly tried to raise his hand. She understood him, and bowed her head, and took his hand and passed it around her neck.

"Elfie—forgive—forgive——" he breathed and then failed.

"Oh, my dear love, I have nothing to forgive," she wept, pressing her lips to his clammy brow.

"Bless you—Elfie—bless——" he panted, and stopped. His eyes glared and his head dropped.

He was dead, in Elfie's arms.

"He is gone, my dear. Come away," said the gentle voice of Sister Agnes, who had come softly to the side of the bed.

Elfie laid her beloved burden back upon the pillow, gazed at the dead face in unutterable love and grief, pressed her lips upon the cold brow, and then turned and gave her hand to Sister Agnes, who led her from the room.

Well it was for Elfie that she was not of a temperament to suppress her emotion.

As soon as she had reached the little bedroom in the third story she threw herself into her friend's arms and burst into a flood of tears.

The Sister of Mercy, young in years, but old in her ex-

perience of sorrow, let the mourner weep and sob, until she had exhausted the violence of her emotions.

Then she led her to one of the beds and made her lie down upon it, and soothed her with tender caresses and gentle words.

And then saying that she would go and send a messenger for Miss Rosenthal, she left Elfie to repose.

It was still very early in the morning, just about sunrise, when Erminie came in her carriage, in answer to the summons, and was shown immediately to the little room occupied by Elfie.

On seeing her friend, Elfie started up and fell upon Erminie's bosom and gave way to another outburst of sorrow.

Erminie silently embraced and supported her until the paroxysm was over. Then she made Elfie lie down again on her bed until Sister Agnes had brought up a cup of tea and a piece of dry toast, which they persuaded her to take.

"And now, my dear," said Erminie, when Elfie had drained the cup, "you must put on your bonnet and mantle and return home with me. The carriage is waiting at the door."

"Oh, Erminie! I cannot—I cannot leave him here!" wept Elfie.

"And you shall not, dear. I have spoken to the surgeon in charge, and he will speak to those in authority and take the necessary measures to have the remains of Colonel Goldsborough removed to our home, where the funeral shall be solemnized," said Miss Rosenthal.

"Oh, Erminie! how can I ever thank and bless you enough!" exclaimed Elfie.

The Lutheran minister's orphan daughter stopped and kissed the sorrowing girl, and then with her own hands put on Elfie's shawl and bonnet and made her ready for her ride.

Lastly, Miss Rosenthal, in a graceful and earnest manner, thanked Sister Agnes for her kindness to Elfie, and then took leave.

When they were in the carriage, Erminie said:

"Give yourself no uneasiness about the details of this

sad duty, Elfie. I will send for the proper people and have everything done to your satisfaction."

"Oh, thanks, thanks, with all my heart and soul!" wept Elfie.

When they reached the parsonage, Erminie made Elfie undress and go to bed, and soon had the comfort of seeing the weeping girl sob herself to sleep.

Erminie sent for her friend, Dr. Sales, and put all the arrangements for the funeral in his hands. And then she sat down and wrote a letter to Elfie's father, telling him all that had happened, and begging him to get leave and come to his daughter as soon as possible.

This letter, as it afterward appeared, never reached Major Fielding, who happened at the very time of its posting to be on his way to Washington.

The funeral of Albert Goldsborough took place on Sunday. He was interred in the same burial ground where the remains of the deceased members of the Rosenthal family reposed.

Elfie returned from the grave sorrowful but composed, and that night she was blessed with the first quiet sleep that had visited her weary mind and body since her meeting with her wounded husband in the hospital.

On the next day, Monday, Elfie, dressed in her widow's weeds, was seated in the library, seeking comfort and guidance from the pages of the Holy Scriptures, when she heard the street door-bell ring.

And the moment after the library door was opened, and Major Fielding entered the room.

Seeing a quiet little woman sitting there in widow's weeds, with her fine hair concealed under a widow's cap, and knowing nothing at all of what had happened to his daughter within the last few weeks, the honest major supposed that he had made a mistake, and intruded upon one of Miss Rosenthal's visitors. And with an——

"I beg your pardon, Madam; I was told that I should find my daughter here," he was about to back out, when Elfie looked up, and exclaiming:

"Papa! papa! oh, don't you know me?" started up and flung herself into his arms, and sobbing violently, clung to him.

"Elfie! you! You in this dress! And weeping so!

What is the meaning of it all?" demanded the old soldier, in unbounded astonishment.

"Oh, papa, papa dear, don't blame me, and—don't blame him, or my heart will break!" sobbed Elfie.

"But—what, what do you mean, girl? Blame who? Blame what?" cried the major in amazement.

"Oh, papa, I couldn't help it, dear, indeed I couldn't. Neither could he," she wept.

"Help what? Compose yourself, and explain, if you can girl. Why do you weep? why are you wearing this dress?" said the major, sinking into the nearest chair, and drawing Elfie down upon his lap.

"Papa, I was carried off by guerrillas and obliged to do it. And—indeed, I am not sorry I did it now. And he was mortally wounded, papa, and dying in the hospital, and, after all, we did love each other so much, and that was how it was. Oh, papa dear, don't be angry with me, or you will kill me!" said Elfie, bursting into a fresh flood of tears.

"I am not angry, but I believe I am half crazed. Will you tell me, Elfie, why you grieve so bitterly, and why you, who never were a wife, should be wearing a widow's dress?" said the patient veteran.

"I told you how it was, papa. I told—told you how it was. O, don't blame us, papa, or if you must blame anybody, let it be me. It was all my fault. Don't blame him; he can't defend himself any longer. You may rail at him, but he cannot reply. His lips are mute now, and the dust lies on them," cried Elfie, breaking into hysterical sobs.

In despair of gaining any clear information from his distracted daughter, Major Fielding arose and placed her gently in the chair, and then went and rang the bell.

Bob answered it.

"Is Miss Rosenthal in the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you ask her to come here, if she pleases?"

Bob disappeared.

In a moment after Erminie entered and greeted Major Fielding with grave and sweet courtesy.

"Erminie, my dear, tell me the meaning of this. I

can't get a coherent word out of this hysterical girl," said Major Fielding.

"But—didn't you get my letter of Friday last?" inquired Miss Rosenthal.

"No, my dear, for on Friday last I left for Washington."

"Then I have a serious story to tell you, Major Fielding, but I will tell it as briefly as possible. Sit down," said Miss Rosenthal.

Major Fielding took a chair. Miss Rosenthal seated herself, and, while Elfie sobbed softly behind her pocket handkerchief, and the major listened attentively, Erminie told the story of Elfie's abduction by the guerrillas, her forced marriage to Albert Goldsborough, the surprise of the guerrilla camp by the Federals, the defeat and death of the Free Sword, and the capture of Goldsborough, the deliverance of Elfie, and her subsequent meeting with her husband in the hospital, and all that followed thereupon.

"Oh, papa! papa! do not reproach me, dear! do not, or my heart will break!" sobbed Elfie, as she once again threw herself into his arms.

"I have no thought of reproaching you, my poor girl," said the gentle father, caressing his child.

"And do not blame him, papa!—oh, do not blame him. He is dead now!" she wept.

"And the dead are sacred, my girl," said the major, gathering his child closer to his bosom.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WING'S GALLANT CHARGE.

Every one knows how hopefully the campaign of the spring of 1864 opened. In almost every engagement the Union arms triumphed.

Colonel Rosenthal's regiment performed their part of duty, suffered their share of casualties and received their meed of glory.

But the glory of war is inseparable from the gloom of death. The regiment was decimated. And it had to be

filled up with raw recruits. And Adjutant Wing, for "gallant and meritorious conduct," was promoted to the rank of captain and placed at the head of Company K, in a position rendered vacant by the casualties of war.

At this time the regiment was stationed at the town of C.

On the afternoon of the day when Wing received his captain's commission he entered the quarters of his colonel, and, saluting him respectfully, said in a tone rather of reproach than of gratitude, for he was by no means elated at the change:

"I presume that I have to thank you for this promotion, sir?"

"Not so, adjuatant. I confess that I am selfish enough to desire always to retain you at headquarters. No—I had nothing to do with the affair beyond speaking of you as you deserved in my report. With a soldier to hear is to obey, Wing. And, whether I like to lose my adjutant or not, and whether you like to leave the office or not, you must assume command of your company before the dress parade at sunset," said Colonel Rosenthal.

Wing bowed and left his colonel's presence.

And at the dress parade he appeared, with his captain's straps, at the head of his company.

But if Wing was not satisfied with his promotion, neither was his company satisfied with their captain. Apparently there was no love lost between them.

When the dress parade was over and the men at liberty to rove over the camp and gather in groups to smoke or gossip, the members of Company K were heard to indulge in mutterings of discontent, not loud but deep. Before the appointment of Wing as their captain, Company K had been commanded by a tall, stalwart, athletic first lieutenant, who was very popular among the men. And this circumstance made the "baby adjutant," as they called him, still less acceptable as their captain.

"To put that little fellow over us! a mere lad!" indignantly growled Sergeant Copley.

"Looks like a girl in boy's clothes!" grumbled Corporal Bang.

"'Boy,' 'girl?' Why, he is a mere infant!" exclaimed Corporal West.

"A mere threadpaper! a mere cobweb! I wonder how he'll stand fire!" laughed Sergeant Jones.

"I wonder what the devil the Secretary of War could have been thinking of!" muttered Corporal Quartz.

"I should like to see him in an engagement once!" said Copley.

"And so should I!"

"And I," muttered each malcontent in his turn.

Very soon they had an opportunity of seeing.

The next morning the third battalion of the regiment, under Major Kerr, the same battalion to which Company K belonged, was ordered to march to P—— to destroy certain saltpetre works belonging to the enemy. P—— was a well-fortified town, distant about forty miles from C——, and the intervening country was infested with guerillas.

The orders were issued at seven o'clock in the morning. By half-past seven the battalion was under arms, with two days' rations. And at eight o'clock they marched.

Their road lay for some miles through the mountainous and heavily-wooded country east of C——. Then through open fields and meadows, and, lastly, into the depths of the valley forest.

At noon they halted for an hour's rest and refreshment, that men and horses might be in good fighting order when they should arrive at their destination.

Then they continued their march until they emerged from the forest and entered upon the more open country, diversified with hills and vaileys, groves and meadows, brooks and rivers.

Winding between the hills, striking across the meadows and fording the rivers, they at length came in sight of the entrenched saltpetre works.

Then a momentary halt was called; an order was given: the bugle sounded the charge, and the whole cavairy force advanced at a gallop.

A fierce fire was immediately opened upon them from behind the breastworks.

In the hail of bullets a man fell here and there, and a riderless horse bounded out of the line of march and rushed madly over the plain. And these gallant men

dashed onward under that storm of death to take the works by assault.

But presently a more serious danger menaced them. The one section of a battery possessed by the rebels of this post consisted of two guns. These guns were now brought into position and trained so as to bear directly upon the right flank of the approaching column, and the first shot fired at so short a distance, took fatal effect, tearing its way through, and leaving a track of death filled up with riders and horses overthrown, struggling, wounded, mutilated, dying, or dead.

"Captain Wing! advance with your company and take that battery!" shouted the major commanding the expedition.

For one instant Wing looked up astonished, for the order was a desperate one, and the duty well nigh a forlorn hope.

Only for that instant did Wing betray his amazement. Then, waving his sabre above his head, he shouted:

"Come on, boys!" put spurs to his horse and dashed forward, leading the charge.

What man among them would not have followed that "light, inspired form," to seek glory even "in the cannon's mouth?"

Like an angel of destruction he rushed onward, followed by all his men.

The enemy, seeing this new movement, turned their guns as quickly as possible upon the charging party.

The first shot in this direction, as on the former occasion, tore its way through the center of the advancing body, strewing mutilated and dying men and horses in its track, and leaving even those who were unhurt half disabled by their restive horses.

They were now approaching the battery by a very broad road, bordered on each side by high wooded banks.

An instant's hesitation now on the part of Wing must have been fatal to the success of the expedition. But there was no such hesitation.

"Close on the center—forward!" came the deep, sweet, solemn tones of the young leader.

And the men closed in close columns, filling up the gap

torn by the cannon ball, and, over the dead and dying, galloped onward.

Again came the shot booming from the battery, and ripping its way through the middle of the advancing column, scattering men and horses dead and dying upon the ground.

"Close on the center—forward!" again sounded the voice of the young leader.

And again the men filled up the gap and galloped onward.

Once more a shot came splitting its way through the middle of the column, strewing its path with the dead and the dying. Once more came the solemn voice of the leader:

"Close on the center—forward!"

And, as before, the men closed up the column and continued the march.

A fourth, a fifth and a sixth shot was fired, each with tremendous effect.

And after each was still to be heard, like the voice of an inexorable fate, the solemn tones of the young leader, issuing his immutable order:

"Close on the center—forward!"

And, although their number was reduced by the loss of at least one-third of their men, they grimly closed column over the dead and the dying and pushed forward.

And in three minutes after the sixth shot had been fired they were upon the works, engaged in a stern hand-to-hand conflict with the enemy.

After a short, sharp struggle of less than half an hour they took the battery, captured two guns and fifty rounds of ammunition and thirty prisoners.

The way into the town from this quarter was now clear. And Wing marched in at the head of his company. And soon over the rebel works the Union flag waved in triumph. About twenty minutes later Major Kerr, at the head of the other three companies, marched into the town. His men had suffered much under the galling fire of musketry that had opposed their entrance previous to Wing's taking possession of the town.

One captain, two lieutenants and about twenty privates

were killed. And two lieutenants and about forty privates were severely wounded.

Major Kerr came up just in time to relieve Captain Wing of a certain responsibility that he always detested—namely, the burning of the town.

Wing's taste was more for fighting than for destruction, and naturally he had taken the town, but hesitated to burn it.

Major Kerr's taste was more for destruction than for fighting, therefore he had let Wing capture the town and had followed him in to destroy it.

Wing pleaded hard for the salvation of private dwelling houses, but, in fact, it was impossible to effectually destroy the saltpetre works without sacrificing the whole town.

The women and children were sent out to a place of safety. The prisoners were dispatched to the rear, and then the work of destruction commenced.

And that night witnessed an awful conflagration, that lighted up a vast ampitheatre of country and carried consternation as far as its flames were seen.

And the next morning the sun rose upon a blackened and smoking mass of ruins where once the thriving village had stood.

The forenoon was employed by our troops in burying the dead and in attending to the wounded. These last mentioned were placed in ambulances to be transported back to C.

And at midday the battalion was under arms and prepared to march.

They reached C. about nightfall, carrying with them the news of the complete success of the expedition.

Major Kerr made a true report of the action, giving Captain Wing his just due of praise.

And the next morning Colonel Rosenthal sent for Wing and expressed his high approbation of that young officer's heroism.

"There is not a man in my company, colonel, who does not merit as much praise as you have kindly bestowed upon me," answered Wing respectfully.

"And they shall receive it. But the wonder to me is, Wing, that you were not hurt, leading the men as you

did to that terrible charge. You were not even slightly wounded, were you?"

"Not even scratched, colonel."

"Pray do you wear a magic armor under your uniform, Wing?"

"Not that I know of, colonel," laughed the young officer.

"You have been in at least half a dozen battles and never once been wounded."

"Never yet, colonel. But I have a presentiment that if I ever am struck I shall not be wounded but killed," said the boy officer gravely.

"Nonsense, Wing, I don't believe in presentiments. I never had a presentiment fulfilled in my life," laughed the colonel.

At that moment an orderly entered the quarters, saluted, and handed a small sealed packet to his colonel.

Colonel Rosenthal broke it open and read it hastily, changed color as he never had done on the most fiercely fought battle-field, and then he passed the paper to Wing, saying:

"You see it is a telegram summoning me immediately to Washington, and it must be acted upon without delay."

Wing also grew very pale as he read the dispatch. He returned it without a word.

Colonel Rosenthal immediately put himself in communication with the general commanding his division, and the next day, having obtained a short furlough, left for Washington.

A very few hours after the departure of Colonel Rosenthal Captain Wing applied for ten days' leave of absence for the purpose of visiting a dear friend supposed to be at the point of death.

As this was the first occasion upon which the brave young officer had made an application of the sort, and as he had so recently rendered a distinguished service, it was promptly granted him.

And the next morning Wing left for Washington.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DEATH LIGHTS.

In the months that had elapsed since Albert Goldsborough's death, and in the steady performance of every duty, Elfie had recovered her serenity and cheerfulness.

The idea of atonement was very strong in Elfie, and under its influence she devoted herself to the service of the sick and wounded soldiers in the hospitals with a zeal equal to that of Erminie.

So the winter and the spring months had passed, and the early summer found the youthful widow serene and cheerful in the discharge of her duties.

There was very little to vary the monotony of this domestic life.

Major Fielding had not been home since the notable occasion upon which his daughter had given him such a surprise.

Justin was with his regiment at C.

Captain Ethel was in command of the gunboat *Fire King* on the Potomac.

And Britomarte was in parts unknown.

Yet letters from every one of these came very often.

On one especial morning a whole budget of news arrived. There was one from Major Fielding to his daughter, announcing his speedy arrival on a short leave. There was one from Justin to his sister, filled with good news of his military success and his personal well-being. There was one from Captain Ethel, promising a short visit to the city and a call upon his fair friends at the parsonage. And, lastly, there was one from Britomarte, postmarked Baltimore, and filled with the warmest expressions of affection for Erminie, and the most satisfactory statements concerning her own health and success. But where she was living, or what she was doing, remained unrevealed secrets.

Elfie, to whom Erminie read the letter, screwed up her mouth and looked like "she could an' if she would" "a tale unfold," but she didn't.

And, besides, Elfie was interested in the other letters and preferred to talk of them and their subjects—her father's promised visit, Justin's encouraging successes and even young Ethel's prospective call.

"It is likely that pap and Ethel will both be here to-day or to-morrow, Erminie, don't you think?" she inquired.

Erminie coincided with her in opinion.

That morning the young ladies lingered so long over their breakfast table and their delightful letters that it was rather later than usual when they set off for the hospitals.

"The morning is so delicious that we will walk, I think, Elfie," said Miss Rosenthal, as they emerged from the front door.

"All right. I would rather walk," agreed Elfie.

And they sat out at a brisk pace.

"Erminie, I always knew you had a very light, elastic step, but indeed to-day you seem to walk with 'winged feet,' as Homer has it. And now I look at you, your cheeks are flushed and your eyes are dancing. It is all of a piece and all equally the effect of those delightful letters, I do suppose," said Elfie.

"I do suppose it is. And yet I do not know. But certainly, though I have always been in good health, I never felt so well in my life as I do now. I feel as if some strong, divine elixir in my brains gave me a new sense of life. But I am talking too much of myself and my own sensations. What nonsense! Let us speak of something else. Young Ethel. I have a great respect for that gallant young officer, Elfie. And if your father comes to make us any sort of a long visit I shall invite Ethel to stop at the parsonage, as he did during his last sojourn in Washington," said Miss Rosenthal.

"That will be very agreeable, only it will curtail us of our liberties. No more sailing all over the house at all hours of the day and night in our white wrappers and slippers," replied Elfie.

And so chatting the young ladies went on their way that bright summer morning toward the hospitals.

From ward to ward Erminie went, carrying everywhere

the same bright smile that shone with such strange, supernal beauty that morning.

And the soldiers whom she cheered and comforted said to each other when she had passed by how she looked—like an angel from heaven, with the celestial light still around her.

They walked the rounds of three other hospitals, and then Erminie spoke of turning their steps homeward.

But Elfie remonstrated.

"I'll tell you what, Miss Rosenthal, you may be exhilarated by some divine elixir, or you may be borne on by invisible wings, but as for me I have nothing but my mortal flesh and blood and bones to uphold me, and I am just so tired that my limbs are ready to bend under me, and my back aches as if I were a hundred years old," she said.

"Under these circumstances we must take a carriage, I suppose," smiled Erminie.

And the carriage was called and they drove home.

Erminie did not go out again to the hospitals that afternoon.

She was expecting a small party of friends to take tea and spend the evening, and it was necessary to make some preparations for them.

So, after an early luncheon, Erminie and Elfie began to gather flowers to decorate the drawing room and the dining room and library.

"My pap is very fond of company. I hope he will arrive this evening. It would be such a pleasant surprise for him to meet a party of his friends here," said Elfie, as she arranged a large bush of odorous magnolia grandiflora to sit on the drawing room hearth.

"I think it quite likely that your hopes will be realized, Elfie," answered Erminie, who was delicately placing a bouquet of lilies and roses in a vase for the center table.

When their preparations were completed Elfie sauntered up to her room to lie down and indulge in her usual afternoon nap.

But Erminie went to inspect the condition of her pastry and to order certain fresh delicacies prepared for the evening feast. And then she called her housemaid and went upstairs and had the rooms she intended to assign

to Major Fielding and Captain Ethel arranged under her own eyes for the reception of their inmates.

When Elfie awoke from her sleep she found Erminie still actively engaged.

"'My heyes!' as the cockneys say, what has come to you, Erminie? You have been on your feet the whole day. You have walked twenty miles at least, if the ground you've gone over was all stretched out in a line, and you have been hard at work ever since you got home, and you look as fresh and brilliant as a blush rose with the morning dew upon it. Really, now, ain't you tired?" inquired Elfie, as she entered the dining-room, where Erminie was decorating the tea-table.

"Not in the least," said Miss Rosenthal, smiling brightly. "But now, my dear Elfie, it is time for us to dress ourselves. Our friends will come early, because the summer evenings are so short."

Elfie yawned dismally.

"Now, I haven't been half so hard at work as you have, and I have had a good nap besides, and yet I feel more like lolling in a rocking chair than putting myself into an evening dress," she said, as she sauntered away to make her toilet.

An hour later, just as the sun set, leaving a clear, beautiful twilight, Erminie and Elfie met in the drawing room to wait for the coming of their company.

Elfie looked very pretty in her thin black grenadine dress, with jet jewelry and the little cap of white illusion that contrasted so well with her raven hair.

But Erminie looked dazzlingly beautiful—not from the effect of her toilet, for nothing could be cooler or quieter than her dress—a pure white grenadine, embroidered in sprigs of black silk, and trimmed with white lace and black ribbon. It was her face, her countenance, that was so radiant. Her cheeks and lips were flushed with a bright carnation color; her eyes were sparkling with animation; even her auburn hair seemed to glitter with a sort of electric splendor.

Elfie gazed on her in wonder and admiration.

"Well, Erminie, you were always indisputably beautiful, but now—— Well, there! You almost alarm me! You look as if there was some inward glory shining

through you and making your earthly beauty heavenly," she said.

"Nonsense, love! Don't you turn flatterer, or I shall lose my respect for you," laughed Erminie.

"Flatterer! There! look in the glass and see for yourself whether I have flattered you! Come, it is still light enough for you to see, or if it is not you will make the light," said Elfie, turning her friend forcibly around to face the tall pier glass that stood between the two back windows.

"Absurd! I am in good health and good spirits—that is the whole secret," said Miss Rosenthal, laughing and blushing and breaking away from the too ardent admiration of Elfie.

And at that moment the first bevy of visitors arrived, and little Mim and his four little maiden aunts were shown into the drawing room.

Erminie received her visitors with courtesy, but Elfie welcomed them with effusion.

Erminie entertained Mr. Mim in the drawing-room, while Elfie took the four Misses Mim upstairs to lay off their bonnets and put on their headdresses.

The next party that arrived consisted of Mr. Billing-coo, his grandmother and his guitar.

And the old lady was shown up stairs to the dressing room, where she found the Misses Mim with Elfie.

After them came other friends of the family, and by seven o'clock the whole company was assembled and enjoying themselves by sauntering through the moonlit walks of the beautiful grounds in the rear of the house.

"I am expecting Major Fielding this evening," said Erminie to little Mim, who was walking by her side.

"I am so glad to hear that. I always had the greatest respect for Major Fielding, as well as for—for his daughter—and for all the ladies."

Little Mim, when ever he was betrayed into any expression of admiration or regard for Elfie, invariably added "all the ladies" as a saving clause. Now, however, though he walked and talked with Erminie, his eyes and his thoughts followed Elfie, as she sauntered on in front of them by the side of Dr. Sales.

"They both reciprocate your regard, I am very sure," said Erminie, kindly.

"Miss Rosenthal," said the little fellow solemnly, "when I learned all in a moment that she was married and widowed you might have floored me with a feather. I beg your pardon for using a slang phrase, but there is nothing that can so well express the effect the news had upon me. And even now I can't seem to get over it. And when I think of what she used to be, and look at her now in her widow's dress, it seems as if I could not recognize her for herself. It is just as if some splendid oriole was suddenly changed into a blackbird," he said, with a profound sigh.

"The mere effect of her dress, Mr. Mim. Elfie is still herself. Naturally, she grieved over the tragic death of Albert Goldsborough, yet not so bitterly as she had grieved over the treason that separated them as lovers three years ago. It was then that the iron entered the soul of Elfie. But she has been stronger ever since."

"She is a heroic girl—and so are all the ladies!" answered little Mim, tempering enthusiasm with prudence.

"Well! well! Where are you all? And who is coming to welcome me?" called out the cheery voice of Major Fielding, issuing from the back part of the house.

With a cry of joy, Elfie dropped the arm of Dr. Sales, turned and sprang past all her friends, and darted up the gravel walk to meet her father, and threw herself into his arms.

Erminie followed her to welcome the veteran.

"And here is a stranger I have brought with me! Captain Ethel! Bless you, I found him on the wharf! conscripted him, and made him come," heartily exclaimed the major, doing three or four things at the same time—kissing his daughter, shaking hands with his hostess, and presenting his friend.

"I am delighted to see you, Major Fielding, and I thank you cordially for bringing our friend with you! Captain Ethel, I congratulate you on your new promotion," said Miss Rosenthal, warmly welcoming her guest.

Young Ethel bowed low in acknowledgment of those courteous words; and then he offered Erminie his arm;

and they followed Major Fielding and his daughter, who had preceded them, down the garden walk.

Major Fielding was surprised and pleased to meet so many of his old friends, and he insisted on believing that they had come purposely to meet him.

Captain Ethel was duly presented to such of the company as were not personally known to him.

And then, as the evening air was growing damp, the company adjourned from the garden to the house, where tea was soon served.

After tea they went into the lighted drawing-room, where Mr. Billingcoo entertained the ladies with some of his best songs, accompanying himself upon the guitar.

And when he had tired himself and his audience, Erminie delighted her friends with some of her finest music on the pianoforte.

But Erminie's radiant and dazzling beauty was the one theme of wonder and admiration among her guests. The almost divine splendor of that beauty had escaped their observation in the moonlit garden; but now in the lighted drawing-room it struck them with something like amazement.

"How lovely Miss Rosenthal looks this evening! I never in my life saw, or even imagined anything so brilliantly beautiful as her face," said sober Dr. Sales to old Major Fielding.

"Yes! I have been watching her. She always was a perfect beauty, you know! but now she's a perfect angel!" answered the major.

And unconscious of the admiration she was exciting, Erminie played and sang unweariedly.

When she arose from the piano, old Mrs. Billingcoo went to her side, and looking at her attentively, said:

"Your cheeks and lips are like scarlet roses, my love! and your eyes are like diamonds!—Are you sure you are quite well?"

Erminie's silvery laugh rang out clearly and joyously, and almost startlingly, from her who was always so quiet.

"My dear Mrs. Billingcoo, I never felt so well in my life! Like Wordsworth's little maid, I feel my 'life in every limb'!" she said. And she immediately left the

room to order ice cream and strawberries, for the refreshment of her guests.

A little later in the evening, when the company was thinking of breaking up, Miss Susy Mim, watching Erminie, said:

"I am sure Miss Rosenthal is keeping up by great effort! I wonder if she hasn't been taking ammonia or something!"

"Ammonia!" indignantly exclaimed Elfie. "Erminie never takes anything of that sort."

"Then what makes her look so? And what makes her act so? Her cheeks are blooming like roses, and her eyes are sparkling like gems! And her spirits are running away with her! It ain't natural, say what you will! And if she hasn't been taking ammonia, or if she isn't putting all this on, she's in danger."

"In danger!" echoed Elfie, in alarm.

"Yes, child!"

"Of what?"

"Fever!"

"Nonsense, Miss Susy, you are always trying to frighten one! Danger? Fever? Why, Erminie has been looking and acting just this way all day! Only growing more brilliant and beautiful every hour," said Elfie, angrily—and all the more so because she secretly shared Miss Susy's fears.

"Well, my dear, I hope I'm wrong. But at any rate, I think that we had all better go home, especially at it is nearly midnight. And when we are gone you had better get Miss Rosenthal to bed as soon as possible."

And so saying, Miss Susy proceeded to act upon her own words, by setting the example of departure.

The other guests followed in turn. And at a few minutes after twelve the company had all gone, with the exception, of course, of Major Fielding, who was to remain, and Captain Ethel, who Erminie insisted should stay.

At a hint dropped by Elfie, these two gentlemen soon took the bedroom candles that were ready for them, and bade good-night to their hostess.

"Are you tired, Erminie?" anxiously inquired Elfie, as

she paused for a moment as the bedroom door of her friend.

"Tired? No! not in the least," laughed Erminie.

"Are you sure?" persisted Elfie.

"Why, of course I am! I tell you I never felt so well in my life."

"I am glad to hear it; and I won't detain you. Good-night," said Elfie, kissing her friend and noticing with wonder the still undimmed splendor of her beauty.

"Good-night," smiled Erminie, vanishing through the door.

Elfie went on to her own chamber, and as soon as her head touched the pillow fell fast asleep.

Elfie slept late the next morning, so late, in fact, that she was at last awakened by Catherine, who came to her with a scared face, roused her and said:

"If you please, ma'am, I wish you would come to Miss Rosenthal!"

"Erminie! what's the matter with her?" exclaimed Elfie, starting up in alarm.

"Indeed, I don't know, ma'am; but she is very ill; and seems to be raving mad."

Elfie sprang out of bed, threw on a dressing gown, thrust her naked feet into slippers, and ran at once to the chamber of Erminie.

There upon the bed lay the good and beautiful girl, unconscious of all that was passing around her, and rolling and raving with fever and delirium.

In the extremity of terror, Elfie ran down just as she was, to the library, where her father was sitting alone waiting for breakfast.

Breathlessly she told him what had happened, and dispatched him to get a physician, saying that he could get one more quickly than a servant could.

Then she hurried back to her tossing and raving friend.

In half an hour the family physician arrived. After making a careful examination of his patient, he came out of the room and sought Major Fielding.

"What do you think of her?" anxiously inquired the major.

"Telegraph for her brother immediately," answered the doctor.

His orders were obeyed, and the same morning the message was flashed along the wires that was to bring Justin to the bedside of his beloved sister.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DEATH WATCH.

By the agency of the powerful medicines administered, Erminie's high excitement was calmed. The beautiful tossing arms were stilled, and lay lightly resting on the coverlet. The fiery flush died out of her cheeks, the terrible light softened in her eyes, and her lovely face, now white and motionless as marble, lay reposing in perfect peace upon her pillow.

Elfie watched on one side of the bed, and Catherine on the other.

Major Fielding and Captain Ethel forbore to go out, even for a walk. In their keen anxiety for the patient, and their earnest desire to render assistance should their services be required, they remained in the library, reading or pretending to read, but really listening and watching for every sound and sight that could suggest anything relative to the condition of Erminie.

Dr. Burney came three times in the course of that day.

Major Fielding and his daughter asked the physician many questions concerning the nature of the sufferer's illness, and the chances of her recovery, and they received answers from him which were intended to be encouraging, but which were really depressing.

Miss Rosenthal's brain and nervous system were very much affected, he said. The disease was paroxysmal in its tendency. She was now composed, and if a reaction into fever and delirium could be prevented, she would do well.

This was all the satisfaction they could get from her medical attendant.

Ah, "if."

Every means, short of drugging her into the sleep of death with sedatives and opiates, were taken to prevent a relapse into her fearful frenzy.

Elfie sat by the bed all night, and administered all the medicines with her own hands, and kept ice to the head and mustard to the feet and wrists of her patient.

But all this was in vain, or attended with only a partial success.

Toward midnight Erminie's cheeks and lips began to flush; she moved restlessly, and muttered in her sleep.

Elfie renewed the medicine, the ice and the mustard, but with little effect.

The evil symptoms increased rapidly, and before morning Erminie was again, with blazing eyes and burning cheeks, raving and tossing in an agony of fever and frenzy.

In the extremity of terror Elfie dispatched first her father and then Captain Ethel, who were both watching the night out in the library, to fetch the physician.

But Dr. Burney happened to be with a lady patient whom he could not leave abruptly, and so it followed that the sun rose before he made his appearance by Erminie's bedside.

A fearful, a terrible vision, met him there. The beautiful and angelic girl seemed to be turned into a raging and foaming demoniac; and it required the united efforts of Elfie and Catherine to hold her down on her bed.

Violent remedies had to be resorted to now to allay the frightful cerebral excitement—cupping, leeching and bleeding were tried in turn; and in reducing the sufferer to calmness, they almost reduced her to death.

And her medical attendant knew, and her anxious friends feared, that as the second attack of frenzy had been more violent than the first, so the third attack must be the most violent, and would probably end in death.

Thus the approaching night was anticipated in horrible dread.

Meanwhile Erminie lay in the collapse of exhaustion —pale and faded as a broken lily—without motion, speech or color, almost without blood, breath, or life.

From time to time Elfie, weeping and watching, moistened the poor girl's lips with a little melted ice.

Toward evening there seemed to be a change. Erminie moved and sighed. And then opened her eyes and breathed.

Elfie bent over her.

"Why——" began Erminie, and then she ceased.

Elfie bent lower, and softly inquired:

"What is that you say, dear?"

"Why—am I——" again commenced Erminie, with an effort; but again her voice failed for weakness.

"Why are you here in bed, do you mean to ask, dear?" suggested Elfie.

Erminie nodded.

"You over-exerted yourself and have had an attack of illness; but you are better now—much better, thank Heaven," answered Elfie, cheerfully.

"How—bloodless—they——" panted Erminie, looking with surprise at her pale fingers, and speaking in the feeble and pointless way common with persons affected as she was, and breaking down before she finished her sentence.

"They were always very white, you know, dear, those fair fingers," said Elfie, encouragingly.

"No—rosy—rosy-tipped——" murmured Erminie, who, when she had been well in mind and body, had been without the least vanity.

"So they will be again, dear. Never mind your fingers. Will you try to swallow a teaspoonful of this arrow-root?" coaxed Elfie.

Erminie, apparently only to please her nurse, nodded assent and opened her mouth like a bird to receive the atom of nourishment. But the effort was too much for her weakness, and when she had swallowed it she gulped, shuddered and shook her head in refusal of anything more.

After a little while she raised her eyes so wistfully to her nurse that Elfie bent down over her to hear what she might have to say.

"How—long—have——" breathed Erminie, faintly, breaking off.

"How long have you been ill, do you mean, dear? Only since the day before yesterday," replied Elfie.

"What makes—so weak?" panted Erminie.

"Only your illness; but you are better now, and you will soon be strong again."

"You—think—so?"

"I know so, dearest. But you must not fatigue yourself by talking so much. Try to sleep."

And before Elfie had well spoken this advice, Erminie had dropped as suddenly into sleep as a stone falls into a well.

But this sleep was not quiet like the preceding one.

As evening approached the sleeper became restless; tossing her limbs about, rolling her head, and rolling her eyes, and muttering in approaching delirium.

But why should I repeat the horrors of that second night? It was but a reproduction of those of the first one.

Again desperate remedies were applied to meet violent symptoms. And again the frenzy was subdued to quietness, but the sufferer meanwhile brought nearly to dissolution. And her medical attendant might well have said, with the conqueror of old:

"Another such a victory and I am ruined."

By noon next day Erminie lay in sleep or stupor, with scarcely a sign of life in her aspect, with scarcely a hope of life in prospect.

Elfie was forced to leave for a few hours, that she—Elfie—might recruit herself with a bath and a nap.

But early in the afternoon the faithful girl was again by the bedside of her friend.

To her surprise she thought she saw symptoms of a favorable change.

Erminie was breathing softly. She opened her eyes, and seeing Elfie, tried to put out her hand.

Elfie took that pale hand and kissed it, and then stooped and kissed the still paler brow.

"Elfie!" breathed the sick girl.

"What is it, dearest?"

"Must I——die?"

"Nonsense, no, my dear, you are in no sort of danger."

Erminie smiled sadly and turned away her eyes. Presently her lips moved as if she would have spoken, and Elfie stooped to hear.

"I want——"

"What, dear Erminie?"

"—My pastor—please."

"I will send for him, dear Erminie."

"Soon——now!" panted the sinking girl.

"Yes, now, dearest, you shall have him," said Elfie, who beckoned to Catharine to take her place at the bedside; and then left the room to have the wish of her friend gratified.

Dr. Sales, the beloved and venerated pastor of the Rosenthal family had, since her father's death, stood in a father's position toward Erminie.

With the deepest distress he had heard of that good girl's illness. He had called every day to see her or to ask after her.

He had not yet been permitted to make his presence known to her. But once or twice, while she lay in stupor, he had stood over her unconscious form, gazing anxiously down on her death-like face; or he had knelt beside her bed, praying silently for her recovery.

It was, therefore, without surprise that Elfie, when she went downstairs, found the pastor waiting in the hall.

"Oh, Dr. Sales, I am so glad to see you! I had just come down to send for you," she eagerly exclaimed.

"How is our dear child this morning?" anxiously inquired the pastor.

Elfie burst into tears.

"Worse?" breathlessly demanded the old man.

"Oh, how can I tell you? Heaven only knows. Her last paroxysm of fever and delirium was less violent; but then such powerful depletives have been used; and it has left her weak almost unto death. But she is conscious now, and has asked for you."

"Can you show me at once into her room?"

"Oh yes, come," said Elfie, softly leading the way upstairs and into Erminie's chamber.

Catharine still sat beside the bed fanning the sinking girl, who had again suddenly dropped into sleep or stupor;—it was impossible to say which.

"You will not disturb her?" whispered Elfie anxiously.

"Certainly not. I will sit here quietly until she awakens or returns to consciousness," replied the pastor, in a low tone.

At a sign from Elfie the girl Catharine arose and left the room. And the pastor seated himself in the vacant

chair and took the palm leaf and fanned Erminie, while he watched for her awakening.

And the room was very cool, shady, and quiet, and so the sleeper lay calmly reposing for nearly an hour, and then she softly opened her eyes and looked with a gentle, bewildered gaze upon the figure of the preacher seated by her bed.

"Do you know me, my child?" whispered the pastor.

She feebly moved her hand and smiled.

"You sent for me, dear child," went on Dr. Sales.

S' - nodded, and then turned her eyes anxiously toward Elfie, who came and bent down to hear what Erminie should have to say.

"Something to give me——" Erminie panted and stopped.

"Strength, do you mean, my dear?" inquired Elfie.

Erminie nodded.

Elfie poured out some liquid from a vial into a spoon and put it to her lips.

Erminie swallowed with difficulty, but seemed to be revived by the dose.

"Now, dear, go—and leave me—with my pastor—please," she murmured.

And Elfie gave the purport of these words to the pastor, and then left the room.

Erminie turned her fading eyes upon the anxious face of her old friend.

He stooped over her to hear what she might wish to say.

"Dear friend, must I die?" she whispered.

"I pray not—I earnestly pray not, my child," answered the pastor, with ill-suppressed emotion.

"But you believe that I must."

"No, no——"

"Don't try to deceive yourself or me, dear friend. You believe that I must die. All the others seem to know that I must. I see it in every face."

"My child, my child, the Lord of Heaven and earth is also the Lord of life and death. He is able to save to the uttermost the body as well as the soul. Pray and believe and live," said the pastor, trying to control his agitation.

"I would rather submit myself to His will. I do not fear death. But——"

Erminie paused, her strength failed, her senses wandered for a moment, her eyes filmed over, and her chin dropped.

Was it a swoon? Or was it death?

In great disturbance Dr. Sales poured. some cologne water upon a fresh handkerchief, and bather her head and face, and held it to her nose, that she might inhale the reviving essence.

And in a few moments he had the comfort of seeing her draw a deep breath and open her eyes. She did not know that she had fainted, for she took up the sentence just where she had left it off.

"For the sake of others, I ought to know my condition, so as to arrange my affairs."

"My child, you are fatiguing yourself too much. Let me entreat you to be quiet."

"No; I must speak—while I can. I feel I have no strength to make any but a verbal will. And Justin is not here. And so—you will listen to me."

"Speak on, then, dear child, but take your time—do not weary yourself."

And with many pauses and rests between her words, Erminie spoke.

"You know, dear friend, the large property left me by by uncles?"

"Yes."

"Well, if I die without a will, Justin, as my heir-at-law, will come into possession of the whole."

"Certainly."

"And I cannot make a will, but I know that I can trust my dear brother to execute my wishes as conscientiously as if they were expressed in the most legally drawn-up testament that ever was framed."

"Indeed you may, my dear," replied the pastor, as he once more bathed her face and head in the reviving cologne water.

"Well, please tell Justin, then, my last dying wishes."

The doctor took out his notebook and pencil to assist his memory, if future need should be.

"I wish Justin to take one-third of the whole of my

property for himself, and to give a second third to Britomarte Conyers, whom I feel sure that he will eventually marry, and to give the remaining third——"

Dr. Sales wrote all this down in his notebook, and then looked up to see why Erminie did not continue. And he saw that she had again grown deadly faint.

"Oh, Father in Heaven! she is hastening her own death by all this effort," cried the pastor, in deep distress, as he threw down his notebook and caught up a bottle of cologne water and freely bathed her face, head and hands.

Again she rallied, smiled, and pointed to the notebook, mutely begging him to take it up and proceed with his work.

"My child, my child, you are too feeble for all this exertion. I must insist upon your resting for awhile," said Dr. Sales.

"Rest—long rest—will come very soon. But now—I must go on," persisted the sinking girl, pointing to the notebook

Dr. Sales shook his head. Erminie turned on him an imploring look, and her eyes filled with tears.

"You cannot resist the prayer of the dying, and the most important part of my bequest is behind. The remaining third——"

Here, with a sigh, Dr. Sales took up his notebook.

"The remaining third of my property I wish Justin to devote to the relief of the aged and indigent mothers left destitute by the death of their soldier sons."

The pastor wrote this down and then looked up for further instructions.

"That is all," said Erminie, simply.

Dr. Sales would willingly have inquired her reasons for making this bequest to the mothers rather than to the widows and orphans of the war, but he refrained from taxing her strength with an explanation.

She, however, saw the question in his face and freely answered it.

"Every one thinks of the widows and orphans of the war. All the concerts and fairs got up for the sufferers by the war are for the widows and orphans. And this is right so far as it goes, for the widows and orphans must be cared for. But no one thinks of the aged and indigent

mothers whose sons have fallen in battle. And this is all wrong, for these old mothers are perhaps the greatest sufferers of all. The widow may find another husband, and the orphan another father, but the desolate mother who has lost her son in battle finds never another to fill his place in the 'aching void' of her heart. Therefore, will I try to relieve the wants, if I cannot comfort the hearts, of the mothers."

These last words were almost inaudible, and before they were well uttered the fair young saint had fainted quite away.

In the utmost distress Dr. Sales rang the bell, which brought Catherine and Elfie to the room.

All the three used their best efforts to restore the swooning girl.

And after some time these efforts were rewarded with success.

The excitement of her interview with Dr. Sales had been far too great for the strength of the sinking girl.

She recovered from her swoon of exhaustion, but it was only to pass into a state of nervous restlessness that speedily progressed into feverish delirium and arose to raging frenzy.

Another awful night with the sufferer tried all the endurance of her attendants.

It was late in the morning before the raving madness subsided and the patient sank into a fatal coma.

The visit of the physician in the forenoon left not a hope in the world for her life.

The minister came and prayed by her bedside, but she heard him not.

She lay in a stupor that every one felt must end in death.

"And her brother has not arrived!" exclaimed Elfie, wringing her hands.

"But she has left her last words for him with me," said Dr. Sales.

The physician went away, feeling certain that at his next visit he should see the white crepe badge upon the door that should warn him a bright young life had left the earth.

The minister remained in the room, watching with

Elfie beside the deathbed and praying God for strength for all to bear the approaching, overwhelming bereavement.

The house was kept very quiet—very unreasonably so, since nothing on earth could now disturb the calm dreamer on the bed. But nevertheless it was kept, so very quiet. Straw was laid before the line of garden wall facing the road, to deaden even at that distance the sound of passing vehicles. The door-knocker was muffled and the wires of the bells were cut. Locks and hinges were oiled. And every man and woman in the place wore list slippers and moved in silence and murmured in whispers.

Very, very still was the place. So that there was no warning of the approaching traveler until the door of the sick room softly opened and Catherine crept in and whispered to Elfie.

"Mr. Justin has come."

With the old, familiar household servants Colonel Rosenthal was still Mr. Justin.

Elfie started up, and signing to Catherine to take her place, slipped out of the room and downstairs, and passed into the library, where she naturally expected to find Justin.

He was pacing silently up and down the floor. On her entrance he turned quickly and demanded, eagerly:

"How is she? How is she?"

"Oh, Justin!" exclaimed Elfie, dropping into a chair and bursting into tears.

"Dead? dead?" cried Justin, breathlessly, starting toward her and seizing her hand.

"Not yet! not yet! Oh, Justin!"

"But—dying?"

Elfie nodded her head and burst into heavier sobs.

Justin threw himself into a chair, covered his face with his hands and groaned in anguish.

And so they remained a few moments—Elfie sobbing heavily, Justin struggling for composure.

At length Elfie arose and with a still heaving bosom went to her companion and said:

"You had better see her now—while—while she—while she still lives."

"Is she conscious?" groaned Justin.

Elfie shook her head.

"Oh, how—how did she take this fatal fever?" inquired Justin, as he arose to follow his conductor.

"How? Can you doubt? By her unremitted devotion to the soldiers in the hospitals. Oh, Justin, Justin! If ever yet a young saint won a crown of martyrdom, your sister will. She visited the fever wards that every one else except surgeons and nurses avoided. She ministered to scores of the fever-stricken, and comforted and saved many. But now, you will see the end."

As Elfie murmured these last words they reached the door of Erminie's chamber, which had been left standing open for the freer ventilation of the room.

"Come in," said Elfie, leading the way.

Justin, with a depressed and reverend bearing, followed Elfie up to the bedside of his sister.

Dr. Sales and Catherine were in attendance, but both silently made way for the afflicted brother, who now stood gazing upon the wreck of his beautiful only sister.

There she lay, still, white, cold and almost lifeless as marble.

Justin's great frame shook with the terrible storm of sorrow that he could not wholly repress.

For a few moments the venerable pastor held back in respect to the sacredness of the brother's grief. Then he went slowly to the side of Justin, took his hand, and said:

"You know how much I feel with you. My grief and sense of loss is scarcely less than your own. But we know also where to look for strength to endure."

Justin wrung the pastor's hand in silence, and then sunk down in the chair that some friendly hand had placed for him.

Leaving the three faithful guardians by the bedside of the sinking girl, Elfie went down to have all manner of comforts and refreshments prepared for the newly-arrived brother. And then, when she had made everything ready, she returned to the chamber of Erminie, and whispered to Justin that his dressing-room was prepared, and that his luncheon would be put upon the table as soon as he should be ready to eat it.

More for the purpose of getting away to indulge his

sorrow in solitude than for any other reason, Justin arose and left the chamber.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE GHOSTLY VISITOR.

"You should lie down and try to get some rest, my poor child. You look quite worn out," whispered Dr. Sales, looking compassionately on Elfie's thin, white face and tremulous frame.

"I will, when Justin returns to the room. I must sleep an hour or two this afternoon, so as to be able to watch with her through the night, if indeed she should live so long," assented Elfie.

And when Justin resumed his place by the bedside, Elfie retired to seek her much-needed sleep, warning them all to have her called if any change should take place in Erminie.

It was as well Elfie went away when she did, for if she had remained in the sickroom five minutes longer no one would have been able to persuade her to go to rest.

For scarcely was the tired girl safe within her sanctuary before old Frederica came hobbling upstairs, and put her into the door of the sickroom.

Justin arose softly and went to her.

"What is it, Frederica?" he asked.

"I want Miss Elfie.."

"She has gone to lie down. She must not be disturbed on any account. Can I supply her place?"

"Well, she asked for Miss Elfie, sir. But if Miss Elfie can't see her, I suppose you can."

"See—who?"

"Miss Conyers, sir."

"Miss Conyers!" exclaimed Justin.

And all the joy his sorrow could admit for companionship rushed into his heart. But then came wonder and perplexity, and he repeated slowly: "Miss Conyers?"

"Yes, sir, Miss Conyers, and she's just offen a long journey, and she looks completely wored out."

"I will see her immediately," said Justin.

And he stole to the bedside, whispered the news of the arrival to Dr. Sales, and then he followed old Frederica from the room and down the stairs.

He opened the library door.

There stood Britomarte, sun-burned, dusty, travel-stained, almost unrecognizable, but undobutedly Britomarte.

"Britomarte! Miss Conyers!" exclaimed Justin, going toward her with both hands stretched forth.

She met him and seized his hands as she exclaimed:

"How is your sister? How is my dear Erminie?"

"Oh, Britomarte! Oh, my friend, in what an hour of sorrow we meet!"

"She is—not gone?" hurriedly breathed Miss Conyers.

"No, not gone, but she is an angel prepared for Heaven, and she is going," groaned Justin.

"Oh, what is it? What is it that is killing her?" wept Britomarte.

Justin told her, as Elfie had told him:

"A malignant fever, caught in the hospital during her attendance upon the sick soldiers."

"Elfie? where is she? How is she?"

"Well, except that she is very much fatigued with incessant watching. She is gone to lie down for a few hours."

"And when can I see my dear Erminie?"

"At any time. Nothing disturbs her now. Would to Heaven it could. But I warn you, dear Britomarte, that the sight will almost break your heart."

"Take me to her, please," said Miss Conyers, rising and taking off her dusty bonnet and shawl.

Justin led the way upstairs to the chamber of death, and Britomarte went up to the bedside and stood gazing upon the ruins of her beautiful friend as Justin had gazed before; and the watchers now made way for her as they had once made way for him; and after a few minutes Britomarte sank, sobbing, upon her knees, and buried her head in the bedclothes.

They let her weep on undisturbed until the storm of grief had exhausted its violence and left her quiet, and then Justin and Dr. Sales approached, and each took a

hand of hers, and they raised her from the floor and placed her on the chair.

"Your grief is one that is shared by us all. All who knew and loved her will be awfully bereaved. Only God can comfort us," said the pastor, gravely, as he pressed the hand of Miss Conyers.

At that moment old Frederica again appeared at the door, ushering in the medical attendant.

The physician in solemn silence shook hands with Dr. Sales, Justin and Britomarte, and then proceeded to examine his patient.

He lingered some fifteen or twenty minutes at the bedside with his finger on her pulse, his eyes on her countenance, or his ear near her lips—counting, watching, or listening for the ebb, or flow, or pause of the currents of life.

At length he made his report: no change in the patient for better or worse. He gave his prescriptions—certain draughts and powders, to be administered under certain contingencies; and he issued his orders to be summoned immediately should any change take place in her, and then he took leave and went away.

The afternoon passed off and no change took place in Erminie. She lay on her bed, like a dead girl on her bier, or like a stone effigy on a tomb, and her watchers sat around her motionless as statues.

As for Elfie, shut away in her distant room, she slept the deep sleep of weariness until after sunset, when she awoke with a start, feeling guilty that she had slept so long. Before even hurrying on her clothes, she threw a large shawl around her and slipped down the back stairs to inquire of Frederica about Erminie.

"She is still the same—no better, but no worse," replied the housekeeper. "And now, Miss Elfie, you had better go back to your room and take a 'freshing bath; and by the time you are dressed, I will bring you a cup of tea and a round of toast," added old Frederica, wisely suppressing the fact of Miss Conyers' arrival, lest Elfie, in her impatience to meet her friend, should deprive herself of the comfort and refreshment so much needed.

So Elfie, ignorant of Britomarte's presence in the house, took her bath and afterward her tea, and feeling

refreshed and strengthened, went immediately to the sick room, and walked directly to the bed where Erminie still lay, a beautiful, white, motionless form, and where the watchers still sat like statues.

In the absorption of all her thoughts with the subject of the sick girl, Elfie had not noticed that there was a stranger present. She looked down upon the marble face, pressed her lips to the cold mouth and the colder brow, laid her hand upon the faintly beating heart, dropped fast tears upon the quiescent form, and murmured:

"No change! no change! Oh, Heaven, will she pass away in this manner, without recognizing any of her friends? What does the doctor say, Justin?"

"He can give no decided opinion," sighed the brother. Then, seeing that Elfie's attention continued to be so fixed upon the patient that she entirely overlooked the visitor, he added:

"Elfie, do you see Miss Conyers?"

And Britomarte arose and held out her hand.

Elfie gave a start and uttered a cry that must have aroused any patient not in a state of coma.

"You—you here! Where did you drop from? When did you come? Oh! but I am so glad to see you; or I should be so, if I could feel glad of anything now," eagerly yet cautiously exclaimed Elfie, in half suppressed excitement and a half smothered voice.

"I came last from Baltimore. I got here at two o'clock this afternoon," whispered Miss Conyers.

"At two o'clock! That was just when I laid down. Why didn't they call me?"

"We would not permit you to be disturbed," said Britomarte.

"My dear Elfie," said Justin, "Miss Conyers has arrived off a long and dusty journey, and needs hospitable attentions of all sorts. May I ask you to take my dear sister's place as hostess, and do the honors of the house to her?"

"Of course, of course," hurriedly whispered Elfie; and she beckoned Britomarte, who followed her from the room.

First Elfie gave orders to old Frederica to prepare a

light repast for the guest. And then she led Britomarte to a chamber upstairs, where she supplied her with water, towels, and a complete change of clothes.

And afterward while Miss Conyers sat drinking tea, she poured into her ear the history of her strange meeting with Goldsborough in the hospital, and his tragic death.

Much of this Britomarte had heard before, by letters from Erminie; but now she heard for the first time the full particulars of the affair.

Elfie then talked to Erminie and her fatal devotion to the sufferers in the fever wards of the hospital, and the martyrdom in which that devotion was about to end. And at that point she burst into tears.

"Take comfort," said Miss Conyers. "I have watched her attentively for the last five or six hours. And friends and physicians may all be mistaken at last; and youth and constitution may eventually triumph."

"Well, I hope so; or rather I would hope if I could," sighed Elfie, despondently.

And then they talked of other matters.

Elfie had her own theory, true or false, of Britomarte's hidden life; and so she forbore to ask Miss Conyers any questions about her manner of existence.

And indeed in a little while they returned to the sick room, where the beautiful Erminie still lay on her bed like a dead girl on her bier.

The gentlemen went downstairs to their late and comfortless dinner; for meals were now very irregular in this house of woe.

After dinner Dr. Sales went away.

And that evening the watch for the night was arranged in this manner:

Elfie, having been refreshed by her long afternoon's nap, was to sit up from eight o'clock until two.

Miss Conyers, being fatigued by her long journey, was to go to bed at eight o'clock, and rest until two, when she was to rise and relieve Elfie.

Accordingly, at eight o'clock Britomarte retired; and Elfie having drank several large cups of strong green tea to keep herself wide awake, took her seat in the big easy chair near the head of Erminie's bed.

She had nothing to do but to think. She could neither read nor sew; for there was no light in the room but the dim taper that burnt upon the hearth. The whole house was very silent. The three gentlemen, Justin, Major Fielding, Captain Ethel, were reading, or trying to read, in the library below.

The two servants, old Frederica and Catharine, her niece were seated in their kitchen.

And the one man-servant, old Bob, was dozing in a sort of porter's chair in the hall near the front door, to be easily within call.

Elfie looked forward wearily, drearily to her six hours of timely vigilance. Nothing but her love for Erminie could have borne through its solitude and tediousness.

Even the first two hours, between eight and ten, when she had waking company in the house, seemed awful in solitude and interminable in tediousness.

All was so silent that she heard the sound of the first footfalls of the family preparing to retire, and it filled her with a strange, nervous sense of desolation and dread.

First came the echo of the distant steps of the women servants going by the back stairs to their rooms in the attic.

Next came the three gentlemen up the front stairs. They all paused at the door of the sick room, to hear the last report of Erminie's condition before taking a final leave for the night.

Elfie went to meet them and gave her cheerless bulletin—"No change."

Justin came in on tiptoes and gazed mournfully on his sister for a few moments, and then kissed her pallid brow and stole away.

And the three gentlemen went up another flight of stairs, separated to their several apartments and retired to bed.

Lastly Elfie heard old Bob drag his mattress up the kitchen stairs and along the hall to the front door, across which he laid it down; for there, like a big watch-dog, he slept all night to guard the door, and also to be at hand to let the doctor in should he call during the night or very early in the morning. The tumbling

rather than the laying down of old Bob on his mattress was the last social sound that Elfie heard to keep her company.

After that all about the house was as still as the tomb. Though Elfie hated snorers, now, so nervous and excitable did she feel, that she would have been glad to hear old Bob snore most sonorously. But apparently the porter was a deep and silent sleeper.

Every five or ten minutes Elfie stooped over her patient; but the still white face, so like the face of the dead, filled her with terror. She could sometimes scarcely forbear screaming and running from the room. But she controlled herself and watched on.

"What has come over me?" she asked of herself. "'I am naturally no coward; and yet here I am listening and watching and starting as if I expected to hear, or see, or suffer something hideous. Is it that I am out of sorts through broken rest and irregular meals—fatigue of body and anxiety of mind? Or is it the effect of the green tea? Or is it the near proximity of death that gives all my surroundings a supernatural aspect and throws over my spirit an atmosphere of awe and dread? I will walk awhile."

And so saying, Elfie arose and paced up and down the floor. Her feet, cased in velvet slippers and walking over a soft carpet, made no noise. So Elfie paced back and forth many times, until she had walked a mile or two, if the distance had all been stretched out in a line.

Then when she had thoroughly fatigued herself, she sat down again in her easy chair. Her act had been a very imprudent one; it had tired her and made her sleepy. Indeed, she was just dropping off to sleep when the striking of the clock aroused her.

It was a very softly, silvery sounding clock; but it was enough to startle an irritable napper; and Elfie awoke with a spring, thinking that she had very nearly fallen asleep; but having no idea that she really had done so.

The clock chimed twelve.

And Elfie, to occupy her mind and keep herself awake, commenced quoting poetry; another imprudent

act, for however appropriate were the lines to the time and scene, they were ill chosen for the occasion, because they made her the most nervous, though not the less sleepy. The lines she quoted were these:

"'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion on the world."

And so on to the end.

Before Elfie got to the end she had dropped to sleep again, and she slept on until she was once more aroused by the silvery striking of the clock. It chimed "one," and she sprang up with a guilty pang.

"Goodness! I had nearly been asleep again. One o'clock! well, the time does pass. Only one hour more of this dreadful watch. I must try to keep awake somehow. It will never do to let Britomarte catch me, a sentinel, sleeping on my post. She is used to military discipline, and might take it into her head that I ought to be shot. And indeed I think she would be right. What a brute I am, even to feel like going to sleep beside this dying angel!" exclaimed Elfie, rising and looking over her charge.

"No change—oh, no change, my poor, sweet martyr," she said, as she kissed the pale brow and then resumed her seat.

"Yes, I must keep awake somehow. Let me try more poetry, though nothing but the horrible recurs to my memory to-night," said Elfie, yawning.

"Now o'er the one-half world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep; now witchcraft——"

Elfie lost herself, nodded forward, caught herself up and began again, "Now witchcraft," and nodded, and then resumed, "Witchcraft," and then she fell fast asleep.

Now what followed Elfie could never exactly account for, could never even understand whether it were reality or "witchcraft," indeed.

But this was what took place, or seemed to do so.

Elfie thought that she was again on the point of dropping to sleep, when she became conscious that a

tall, handsome, black-haired and black-dressed man stood beside her. She seemed only half awake, and took the man for Justin, and was about to speak to him, when she suddenly recognized the rebel General Eastworth, supposed to be then in the entrenched lines of Charleston, helping to defend the city, but also reported to have been killed in the last assault by the Union forces.

Before Elfie recovered from her astonishment so as to be able to call out, the man, or the ghost, whichever it was, stretched forth his arm, and placed a moist sponge, enveloped in a white handkerchief, to her nose. And Elfie was at once exhilarated and overwhelmed by a strange, delicious odor that intoxicated her with a wild yet sweet delirium, and deprived her of both the will and the power to change her position.

Sitting there, perfectly powerless, yet perfectly conscious, unable to move or to speak, she yet heard and saw all that passed.

The tall man pinned the sponge in the handkerchief to her bodice directly under her nose, so that, with her head resting on her breast, she must continue to breathe the fumes.

Then he turned and dropped on his knees by the bed, so as to bring his dark, agonized brow nearer to the level of the beautiful pale face pillowed there, and he kissed the cold lips passionately and wept.

"Oh! my dearest, my dearest, is it even so? I am here at the risk of my life, of my honor, only to look upon your sweet eyes once more before they are hidden forever in the grave, only to hear your gentle voice speak forgiveness before it is hushed forever in death! But your eyes are closed—your lips are mute—and your wings are already spread for Heaven! Oh, Erminie! Erminie! how could I ever have weighed my mad ambition against your holy love! Oh, my darling! my darling! that I could offer up my life in ransom for yours! I would give my life to restore you, my love!—nay, I would give my life merely to hear those sweet silent lips speak one word—forgiveness!"

And here the strong man bowed his head upon the sides of the bed and wept convulsively.

And now came the strangest part of the strange vision.

Elfie, witnessing all that occurred, as in a nightmare dream, from which she sought in vain to wake, saw also this strange phenomenon.

The white-robed form of Erminie slowly arose to a sitting posture; the golden glory of her auburn hair fell around her like a halo; her face shone "as the face of an angel;" she stretched forth her fair arms and let her fair hands fall softly and slowly as snowflakes upon the bowed black head beneath them; and she murmured, in a grave, sweet, silvery cadence:

"'Tis not for me to say the Heavenly word. But you sought me and I love you. You saved my dear father from a dreadful doom, and I bless you. May the Lord speak forgiveness to your soul, my love."

Yes, to Elfie's incredulous amazement, she who, for twenty-four hours, had lain on her bed "like a marble girl on a marble slab," incapable of being moved to consciousness by the gentle words and caresses of her only brother, or by the tender tears and kisses of her bosom friend, had been stirred to life and roused to response by the passionate appeal of her ghostly lover!

Simultaneously with this strange discovery, there was a ringing as of many bells in Elfie's ears, a dancing as of many lights in Elfie's eyes, and the whole vision was whirled away from her in a delirious carnival of glory.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ELFIE'S VISION.

"Elfie! why, Elfie, wake up!"

It was the voice of Britomarte, speaking in a low but eager tone, as she gently shook the girl to rouse her.

Elfie yawned, stretched her arms, and gazed around in perplexity.

"Elfie! what, Elfie! asleep on your post! In the army we—I mean they—shoot sentinels for such derelictions from duty," said Miss Conyers.

"Ow—ow—ow!" gasped Elfie, "is he gone?"

"Gone! Who gone?"

"General Eastworth, or his fetich!"

"General Eastworth! You are dreaming, Elfie. Wake up! I wonder that you should have allowed yourself to go to sleep."

"I have not been asleep for one minute—not for one minute during my whole six hours' watch, though I have been near dropping off several times; but I managed to keep wide awake," said Elfie, with the usual self-delusion of such drowsy delinquents.

"Why, Elfie, I found you sleeping so soundly that I could scarcely wake you."

"Ow—ow—ow!" yawned the culprit. "I tell you I have not been asleep one instant. I have been chlo—ro—formed by General Eastworth. That's what's the matter."

"Chloroformed by General Eastworth!' Why, Elfie, you are not even yet awake. You are still dreaming and talking in your sleep. Rouse yourself, girl!"

"Rouse myself, indeed. I never was so broad awake in the whole course of my life as I have been within the last hour. My eyes have been stretched so wide open with astonishment that I don't believe I shall ever be able to close them again. General Eastworth, or his fetich, has been here, and Erminie has spoken with him. There—what do you think of that?"

"I think you are talking at random. I think you are still under the influence of your dream. You must have been very far gone in the 'land of Nod' to be so long in getting back again. It is well that your patient has lain so quietly all this while as not to need your attentions," said Miss Conyers, in a rebuking manner. "I wonder how long you slept. Can you remember what hour the clock struck last?" she inquired.

"I should think I could," replied Elfie, crossly, for she was irritated at the incredulity of her friend; "I should just think I could! I was broad awake, repeating a passage of Shakespeare to myself, suitable to the time and circumstances, when I heard the clock strike 'one,' and at the same time I saw standing by me—a man."

"Nonsense, Elfie!"

"No, it was a man. First I thought it was Justin come in to ask after his sister. And I looked up to speak to him, and then I recognized—General Eastworth. The

sight of him here, and at this hour, took away my breath, and before I could recover it he chloroformed me—not at first to insensibility, but to powerlessness. I could neither move nor speak, but I saw and heard all that went on. The rebel General Eastworth has been here in this room within the last hour. And Erminie has spoken with him."

"Elfie, this is moonstruck madness."

"No, it isn't; it is truth and soberness. He bent over her, wept over her, knelt by her bed and apostrophized her as one does the dead. And she rose *up* and laid her hands upon his head, and blessed him and forgave him. And then the whole scene passed from my senses to the ringing of silvery bells and the flashing of Drummond lights. I suppose the chloroform he had pinned under my nose produced its full effect, and threw me into unconsciousness. But I have a very clear recollection of what happened before. And I am willing to make an affidavit that General Eastworth has been here, and that Erminie has spoken to him."

"Good heavens, Elfie! how can you be so utterly irrational? General Eastworth is in the beseiged city of Charleston, helping to defend it, if he is not in his grave, as is reported. So it is clearly impossible he could be here. And Erminie—see for yourself. She is prostrate, as she has been for many hours, without sense or motion."

"So I hear you say. But I must believe the evidence of my own eyes and ears for all that," pouted Elfie.

"I think I can explain this, my dear. You say you heard the clock strike 'one,' and immediately saw the man at your side, and the strange play began. Now, I will tell you what probably happened. As the clock struck 'one,' you fell asleep. In the meantime, our doctor, returning from some late professional visit, and knowing that old Bob was sleeping at the hall door, called to see our patient. He was admitted, and came up into the room, and you, half awakened by his entrance, and oppressed with indigestion and nightmare—you would eat new cheese for supper, Elfie, though I warned you not to do it—you imagined the harmless medical attendant to be the rebel general, and you dreamed the rest."

"Well, if I did——! But what is the use of talking to you matter-of-fact folks? You believe nothing that isn't evident to your own senses. I wonder you believe in the Christian revelation!" angrily exclaimed Elfie.

"Go to bed, my dear, and when you have had a good wholesome sleep, you will rise in a better and more reasonable mood; and to-morrow we can easily find out from old Bob if the doctor or any one else called during the night. Come, Elfie, take my advice and retire," recommended Miss Conyers.

"'Retire' indeed! Do you think, after the supernatural horrors of this night, I can retire and compose myself to sleep? No, indeed!"

"Then, if you remain here, you must compose yourself to silence, my love. I think I see a change coming over our patient and our talk may disturb her."

"Pray Heaven she may not be rising into another paroxysm of fever and delirium. She could not outlive another attack," said Elfie, quick to take alarm.

"Be quiet, please," whispered Miss Conyers.

And Elfie sat down on a low stool at the foot of the bed and said not another word.

Miss Conyers took her place in the large easy-chair beside the head of the bed, from which position she could easily watch the countenance of Erminie.

The clock struck three and the morning was coming on apace.

All was cool and quiet in the room; and another hour passed slowly by; and, in the sweet light of the early dawn, the night taper on the hearth burned dimly.

Miss Conyers arose and put it out; and then she went to the windows and opened them all to let in the light and air of the lovely summer morning.

Then she went to the bedside to examine the condition of her charge. And she saw a change that caused her heart to leap for joy!—a change for the better, slight, but so decided that she knew the crisis had passed favorably; that physicians and friends had all really been mistaken; that youth and constitution had conquered, and that she, whom they had all called the "dying girl," was about to recover.

True, Erminie lay as still as she had lain for twenty-

four hours; but not as cold or deathlike. Her face was calm; her flesh was soft, warm and moist; and her breathing was low, gentle and regular.

"Thank God, thank God!" breathed Britomarte, sinking on her knees to offer up this ovation of gratitude.

"What is it?" murmured Elfie.

"She will live!" joyfully exclaimed Britomarte, rising from her knees.

"Oh, thank Heaven! Oh, what a happiness for Justin and for us all!" exclaimed Elfie, in full sympathy.

"But now, my dear," said Miss Conyers, "I must retire a little from the bedside. Her coma has passed into healthful sleep, from which she will presently awake. And when she does awake, she must not, just at first, see me, whom she is not prepared to see by her bedside. The surprise might hurt her."

"Certainly, I will take your place here," answered Elfie.

And they were about to effect the change, when a sweet, low voice stole on their ears:

"Britomarte, dear Britomarte, is that you, love? When did you arrive?"

And calmly, sweetly, naturally Erminie turned her gentle eyes and held out her thin hand to welcome her friend.

"My own best loved, my darling, my angel, I am so happy to see you better," murmured Miss Conyers, with tremulous tones and tearful eyes.

"And I—I am so very glad to see you, too. Have the servants attended to your wants and made you comfortable? Is your room arranged to your liking?" affectionately inquired Erminie, whose first thoughts on recovering her consciousness were for the welfare of others. Her voice was faint, but clear and calm and well sustained as she spoke.

"They have made me very comfortable, dear girl. Don't disquiet yourself," replied Miss Conyers, tenderly stroking Erminie's hair.

"I know the best regulated households will get out of order when the mistress is ill. And I have been very ill; but, thank Heaven, I am better now."

"Yes, thank Heaven, you are better now, sweet friend."

"And you are sure you have not been neglected?"

"Quite sure, dear. You know that Elfie has been 'acting' mistress during your illness."

"Yes, but I know that dear Elfie has been with me all the time in this room. Whenever I have had a glimpse of consciousness I have seen her by my bed. Dear Elfie!" continued Erminie, turning to her nurse, "dear, dear Elfie, how shall I ever be grateful enough to you?"

"There shall be no such word as 'grateful' between you and me, Erminie. Or, if there must be, it is I who must be grateful—first to the Lord for giving me so dear a friend and continuing her to me; and next to you for your love since childhood, and your protection since the war."

"Don't say that, Elfie," said Erminie.

"Oh, my darling, I am so rejoiced that you are better!" exclaimed Elfie.

"So am I," said Erminie, frankly. "I have something to live for now. And I had rather live, if it please the Lord. My father is living."

As Erminie spoke these last four inexplicable words, Elfie started violently, and even Britomarte changed countenance. They were both alarmed. They both thought that Erminie had been talking too much and had become dangerously excited, and that another paroxysm of fever and delirium was imminent.

But this was not so.

"Did you hear me say, girls, that my dear father is living?" she calmly inquired.

"Yes," said Miss Conyers, speaking with an apparent composure that was very far from her real condition; "yes; but why do you think so?—I mean, how do you know it?"

"I will tell you, dear, some other time. Now I do not feel equal to the theme. And besides, Elfie, dear," she said, turning to her nurse, "I am so hungry."

It was a "word and a blow," for before Erminie had finished speaking Elfie had whisked from the room.

And in ten minutes she returned with a little tray cov-

ered with a white napkin, and a cup of weak green tea, and a round of delicate brown toast.

Erminie drank the tea with a great enjoyment, and even ate a morsel of the toast.

"I could drink another, only I do not think it would be prudent, and so I will refrain," she said, as she gently pushed away the tray."

"No, it would not be prudent, dear. When the doctor comes, we will ask what you may take, and how much of it. And I only hope he may say you may eat and drink as much as ever you like of whatever you fancy," said Elfie, as she removed the little service.

"Elfie, darling, did I dream I saw, or did I really see my dear brother Justin by my bed?" inquired Erminie, with an effort at recollection.

"You really saw him, love. He is in the house," replied Elfie, very much relieved to find the way opened so easily for introducing Justin, without too greatly surprising Erminie in her weak condition.

"I thought so. I had glimpses of consciousness when I saw you by my bed, and that did not perplex me, because I knew, of course, that you were always here. But sometimes, in those same glimpses, I seemed to see Justin, and before I could confirm the impression I was snatched away again from all knowledge of surrounding things. When did he come?"

"Yesterday, a few hours before Britomarte's arrival," said Elfie.

"It is very early in the morning now?" inquired Erminie.

"The sun is just rising."

"And Justin is not up yet. When he rises, let him know that I want to see him. And now I must rest, please," said Erminie.

Britomarte and Elfie between them raised her up. Britomarte supported her, while Elfie turned and beat up the pillows, and straightened the sheet. And then they laid her comfortably down, and made all tidy around her while she fell asleep.

Then Catherine was called to watch the sleeper, while Britomarte and Elfie went to make their morning toilets,

and to take the early breakfast of which they stood so much in need.

Meanwhile the news of Erminie's convalescence spread through the house, filling every heart with surprise and joy, for every member of the household dearly loved the amiable young mistress.

Old Bob, taking up "Mr. Justin's" hot water, gladdened the brother's heart with the intelligence of his sister's rescue from the grave.

And Colonel Rosenthal hastened through his morning exercises and hurried down into the library, where he found Britomarte and Elfie at breakfast.

"Is it true?" he eagerly inquired, as he joined them, and before even tendering the conventional "good-morning."

"Thank Heaven, yes. All danger is past," replied Britomarte.

"Has the doctor said so?"

"The doctor has not been here this morning. But it needs no doctor to tell that Erminie is raised from death," said Elfie.

"Can I see her now?" inquired Justin.

"She knows you are here. She has asked to see you as soon as you should be up and dressed. But she is sleeping now, and so you must wait until she wakes. Meanwhile, you had better draw up your chair and take breakfast with us."

Justin followed this advice and seated himself at the table.

Domestic affairs were administered in a very easy, not to say loose, manner since the illness of Erminie.

The members of the family and the guests came down to breakfast when they were ready, and got at it when it was prepared, without waiting for others.

Thus it happened that our family party was half through with the morning meal before Major Fielding and Captain Ethel made their appearance.

Hot coffee and hot chops were ordered for the newcomers, who, after the morning greetings, took their places at the table, and the meal progressed.

Major Fielding and Captain Ethel were then made happy with the news of Erminie's convalescence.

"And the doctor is sure that all danger is past?" inquired Major Fielding.

"We are sure that all danger is past, but the doctor has not seen her this morning," said Miss Conyers.

"I humbly beg your pardon, miss," said old Bob, who was waiting on the table. "I humbly beg your pardon, miss, but the doctor have seen her this morning. He have been here airly, very airly, indeed, miss—in fact, before day."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Conyers, whose memory immediately reverted to Elfie's dream, or vision, and her own—Britomarte's—version of it.

"Yes, indeed, miss. He rousened me up outen my sleep to let him in."

Miss Conyers here looked archly at Elfie, whose face exhibited a curiously blended expression of mirth, relief and mortification; for she was struck with the ludicrous aspect the affair now assumed, and she was glad to have a supernatural mystery cleared up; but she was also ashamed of the part she had played in the farce.

"Do you know at what precise hour the doctor came?" inquired Miss Conyers.

"Yes, miss. It must abeen 'bout 'tween one and two o'clock. Way I know it is this: Just arter he came downstairs, and I let him out ag'in, I heerd the hall clock strike two."

"How long do you suppose he was upstairs?" inquired Miss Conyers.

"Well-nigh upon an hour, I should say, miss. You see, I kept awake to let him out."

Britomarte looked at Elfie and burst into an irrepressible fit of laughter.

Elfie pouted, sulked, and finally caught the infection and laughed heartily for company.

"There seems to be some joke here that we of the masculine persuasion are shut out from enjoying. Pray, may I, without indiscretion, inquire into its nature?" asked Major Fielding.

And Justin and Ethel, by their looks at least, seconded the motion.

"It is Elfie's secret," laughed Miss Conyers.

"Well, you may tell it, Britomarte," laughed also Elfie.

"It seems, then," said Miss Conyers, "that this young lady had the watch; that, wearied out with many days of lost rest, she fell asleep at her post; and, having indulged in new cheese for supper, she had the nightmare; and so, when the doctor paid his nocturnal visit, she took him for the rebel, General Eastworth, and because she couldn't wake, imagined that he had chloroformed her to prevent her giving alarm."

And here Major Fielding burst into a laugh, in which he was joined by Justin, Ethel, Britomarte and even Elfie.

But then their hearts were lightened of so great a load that it was easy to rouse them to laughter.

After breakfast Major Fielding and Captain Ethel, knowing that they, in any case, would not be permitted to see Miss Rosenthal that day, and feeling relieved of all anxiety on her account, went out to take a walk, and transact some business that had been neglected during Erminie's illness.

As soon as Erminie was awake, and had been refreshed by ablutions and a change of dress, Justin was summoned to her room.

He found her lying on her bed, with her head raised by many pillows, looking wan, fair and transparent, and yet so much better than she had seemed the day before.

Repressing his strong feelings he advanced to her bedside, stooped over her and kissed her gently, saying softly:

"My dear Erminie! my dear, dear sister! how thankful to Heaven I am to find you so much improved."

She put her arms around his neck, and drew him closer to her heart, and returned his fond kiss; but all in silence.

Very quiet was the interview between this devoted brother and sister.

"I am so happy having you here, sitting by me and holding my hand," whispered Erminie, with her fingers clasped in his.

"And I am so happy to be here, and to see you so much better," murmured Justin.

"When you left us you wore a captain's straps; now you wear the colonel's eagle," said Erminie, proudly.

"Yes, dear sister; and my greatest pride in wearing them is that they give you pleasure."

"You will have a general's star before long."

"I will try to earn that for your sake, sweet sister."

"Have you seen much of Britomarte?"

"Yes, dear."

"Do you know where she lives, what she does?"

"She has told me nothing, dear, of her residence or occupation. She keeps her secret," answered Justin, rather evasively.

But Erminie was not extreme to mark the flaws in his reply. She started another subject.

"Justin," she said, "I am sure our dear father lives."

"Heaven grant that he may, my dear," said Justin, humoring what he supposed to be the fancy of a weak invalid, but recollecting with a pang the body removed from its humble grave on the battlefield of Bull Run, and interred in the family burial lot in the cemetery at Washington.

"I am not strong enough now to tell you how I know this; but I will explain it in a day or two."

"You shall take your own time, love," said Justin.

So quietly they conversed together until the entrance of the doctor.

He had been received by poor, old, stupid Frederica, who had omitted to tell him the good news about his patient, probably under the impression that he was fully aware of Erminie's condition. And he had not made the usual inquiry of "How is Miss Rosenthal this morning?" because he shrunk from asking the question until he should reach the sickroom. He had not seen the other members of the family, and so he came into Erminie's presence all unenlightened as to the favorable change in her condition.

And the first thing he saw was Erminie, propped up on pillows, conversing cheerfully with her brother.

"Bless us! here is a change!" he exclaimed, with a smile, as he walked up to the bedside. "How are we this morning?" he asked, taking the chair vacated for him by Justin, and feeling the pulse of his patient.

"Getting well as fast as possible, doctor," smiled Erminie.

"Yes, yes, we are getting well fast! We can relish a little chicken broth this morning, can we not?"

"I think we can," she answered.

"And a half a glass of port wine. And to-morrow it may be a whole glass."

Erminie nodded.

"She will require no more medicine, only careful nursing and dieting," said the doctor, turning to Justin.

"I am very glad to hear you say so, Doctor Burney. Did you see indications of this favorable change when you visited her early this morning?"

"Early this morning? I have not been here before this morning," said the doctor, in some surprise.

"Well, then, in the night, perhaps, I should rather say, as it was but a little past one o'clock when you called," said Justin, correcting himself.

"I called!" repeated the doctor.

"Between one and two in the night," explained Justin.

"My dear sir, you are mistaken! I have not been here since six last evening," said the doctor.

"Indeed! Then who——" began Justin; but he immediately caught up his words. Here was a mystery; but it would never do to worry Erminie's mind with it. So he paused.

"Whatever could have made you think I was here in the night?" inquired the doctor.

"It was a mistake, either of mine or somebody else's," evasively replied Justin.

"But who said I was here?" persisted the doctor.

"One of the servants, I believe, fancied that you had called."

"Which one?"

"Old Bob."

"Oh, ah, he dreamed it! I was six miles from here between one and two o'clock. I was out at a diabolical old place called Witch Elms, attending the deathbed of an antediluvian old woman, named Miss Pole."

While Colonel Rosenthal and Doctor Burney conversed together, Erminie listened attentively, turning toward each as he spoke. Occasionally an arch smile played over her expressive features, as though she thought she could, if she pleased, explain the mystery that so puzzled her

physician and her brother. But when she heard the name of the old lady at Witch Elms, she said:

"I knew Miss Pole slightly She was the great-grand-aunt of my dear friend, Miss Conyers. I called at Witch Elms once. The reminiscence is not a pleasant one. Still, I hope the old lady was well prepared for the last great change."

"I doubt it," said the doctor. "She died very much as I imagine she had lived. And she left me two very strange commissions. The first was to deliver into the hands of Britomarte Conyers a certain packet not to be opened until after her funeral. The second was to forbid Miss Conyers from attending that funeral. I shall discharge both before leaving the house this morning."

"Strange commissions, indeed. But, then, Miss Pole was a very strange woman."

"Yes. And now, my dear Miss Rosenthal, I think you have talked long enough. A new convalescent, like a newborn babe, has but two great duties to perform—to eat and sleep alternately. Here comes our good Catherine with your chicken broth. So we will now leave you to discuss that, the most wholesome subject that can occupy your thoughts just now."

And, so saying, the doctor smiled and bowed and walked out of the room, accompanied by Justin.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BOB'S SPECTRE.

"Come into the library, if you please, Dr. Burney. I wish to send for old Bob, and confront him with you, and clear up this mystery of the midnight visitor," said Justin, leading the way to the favorite room.

"Nonsense, my young friend. There is no mystery in the matter. Our honest old Bob supped off pork chops and had the nightmare and dreamed of a visitor," laughed the doctor, as he followed the colonel.

"Then, two persons of very opposite characters and positions must have had the nightmare at the same time

and dreamed the same dream," said Justin, as he opened the library door.

When the two gentlemen entered, the favorite room, they found Britomarte and Elfie waiting for the termination of the doctor's visit to Erminie before they should return to her side.

They now arose and received the doctor's greetings and congratulations upon the convalescence of their friend, and then they were about to withdraw, when Justin stopped them.

"Remain, if you please, for a few moments, young ladies. I am about to call up old Robert and confront him with Dr. Burney and investigate this affair of the nocturnal visitor," he said.

"But I thought that was already settled. It was the doctor who came in the night, was it not?" inquired Britomarte.

"No, my dear Miss Conyers, whoever it was, it was not the doctor," replied the gentleman in question.

Justin rang the bell, and old Bob answered it.

"Sit down, doctor. Young ladies, pray resume your seats," said Justin, as he set the example by placing himself in a chair.

Bob stood in the door, waiting orders.

"Come here," said Colonel Rosenthal.

The man obeyed, looking puzzled and frightened and very much like a prisoner who was arraigned and who expected to be found guilty.

"Now, tell us who it was that you let in last night."

"The doctor there, sar," answered Bob, without a moment's hesitation.

"My good friend, you never were more mistaken in your life. I can prove an *alibi*. I was six miles from the spot at the hour you admitted the visitor," said Dr. Burney.

Old Bob's jaws dropped and his eyes opened.

"Is that so, sar?" he asked, in a piteous tone.

"Yes, that is so. Now try to recollect yourself and reflect whether you did not fail asleep and dream the whole thing."

"No, marser! no, sar! it might a been de debbil, or it might a been a ghost, or it might a been a token of my

death, but it warn't no dream. Dis chile war too wide awake for dat!" exclaimed Bob, as his hair seemed to straighten out with a retrospective terror.

"Now see you here, Bob. Look at me, and tell me really whether the person you admitted, or think you admitted, resembled me," said Dr. Burney.

"Lor' forgive me, Marse Doctor, now I does look at you, sar, and calls up my memorandum, it seems to me as the—the—other one—was more taller and more darker complected than you is, sar. It must a been a spirit, sar, come to warn me as my days war numbered," shuddered the old man.

"Fudge, old fellow! All our days are numbered, for that matter. Colonel"—and here the doctor turned to address Justin—"you said that there was another witness in this case—who was it?"

"Elfie," said Justin, "have I your permission to speak?"

"Yes, certainly," replied the young lady addressed.

"Well, then, Mrs. Goldsborough was the other witness. 'A the same hour at which old Bob admitted the mysterious visitor, Mrs. Goldsborough was watching by the bed of my sister, when she was suddenly aware of the presence of a man by her side. Taking him at first to be myself, she was about to speak, when, on looking closer, she recognized, or thinks she recognized, the rebel General Eastworth, supposed to have been killed at Charleston."

"I am quite sure I recognized him," put in Elfie.

"Well, then, she is quite certain she recognized him. She was at first so stupefied with astonishment that she could not call out. And before she could recover her self-possession and give the alarm, he applied chloroform to her nostrils, and deprived her of the power of moving and speaking, although not of hearing and seeing."

"I heard and saw everything that occurred in the first few minutes of his presence there," added Elfie.

"She asserts that he spoke to my sister, succeeded even in arousing her attention, and calling her back to full, though transient consciousness, and gaining her forgiveness and her blessing."

"And by that time," added Elfie, the chloroform that

he had secured under my nostrils so completely overcame me that I knew nothing more until Britomarte aroused me."

"And is that all?" inquired the doctor.

"Yes, and enough, too, I should think," answered Elfie.

"And what is your opinion of all this, colonel?" inquired the doctor.

"I am perplexed beyond measure, and, as yet, can form no possible opinion. General Eastworth has been in Charleston, South Carolina for the last twelve months. He is reported to have been killed within the last week. I can make nothing of it."

"I am not perplexed. I can make something of it. I believe that General Eastworth is in Washington City in disguise, that he has become acquainted with the notorious fact of Erminie's illness, and also with the less well-known facts of the doctor's frequent night calls, and old Bob's position in the front hall, to open the front door at all hours, and I believe that he boldly ventured in to see his once betrothed. Bosh! who do you think is a fool? Didn't I see and hear him with my own eyes and ears? True, I was staggered in my conviction of identity when old Bob insisted that it was the doctor he let in; but now that the doctor says it was not he, I am convinced it was General Eastworth, and that General Eastworth is now in Washington City, as a spy, most likely," said Elfie, with great positiveness.

"Pray, have you read the morning papers, miss—I beg your pardon—Mrs. Goldsborough?" emphatically inquired the doctor.

"I have not," said Elfie; "why?"

"Nor you, colonel?" he next asked of Justin.

"I have glanced over them only. We have all been too much occupied with my sister to read them with much attention or interest," replied Justin.

"Then probably this little paragraph, concerning the gentleman we have been discussing, has escaped your attention."

"What is it?" inquired Elfie.

"Read it," said Justin.

The doctor opened the paper he held in his hand and read:

THE REBEL GENERAL EASTWORTH.—The report of the death of this notorious leader is undoubtedly well founded. The Rev. Dr. Robinson, returned from Charleston under a flag of truce, confirms the tale. On the morning of the twelfth instant General Eastworth, while riding along the eastern defences of the city, was instantly killed by a shell from one of our gunboats.

"There," said the doctor, folding up the paper, "what do you think of that?"

No one answered. Every one seemed dumfounded.

Old Bob was the first to break the silence. Seeing amazement on every face, he gasped out:

"Wha—wha—wha—wha—what does all dat mean?"

"It means that you let in a ghost, Uncle Bob!" exclaimed Elfie, mischievously.

"Wha—wha—wha—what ghost?" stammered the old man, with chattering teeth, starting eyes, and ashen cheeks.

"The ghost of the rebel General Eastworth, who was killed in Charleston," said Elfie.

"Oh, my Lor'! my Lor'! my Lor'! I'm a dead nigger!" exclaimed Old Bob, with all the superstitious terrors of his race strong upon him.

"You may leave the room, Bob," said Colonel Rosenthal.

And the old man hurried away to tell the wonderful story in the kitchen, and then to betake himself to his prayers.

"Now, then, Mrs. Goldsborough, what do you say?" inquired the doctor.

"I say that I am of the same opinion still. I believe that story of General Eastworth's death to be a mere canard, or more than that, a stratagem to cover his surreptitious visit to Washington. I tell you I saw and heard him with my own eyes and ears; and I am willing to go before the provost marshal and lodge the information under oath, that the great rebel general was in Washington City, and in this house, last night between the hours of one and two! If you think my story wants confirmation, let Justin question his sister as to who her visitor last night was. I was strongly tempted to do so myself; but I refrained from consideration for Erminie's weak state. But let Justin question her now."

"Thanks—no, if you please," said the doctor, emphatically—"not with my sanction. Colonel Rosenthal and ladies, I must earnestly request you not even to allude to this strange event in my patient's hearing. In every point of view, the subject would be a dangerously exciting one to her. But I strongly advise you to have the cashbox and plate chest examined, and a detective policeman sent for. With all respect for your opinion, Mrs. Goldsborough, I must believe that an accomplished burglar has found his way into the house, and probably effected a robbery."

And with these words the doctor turned to Miss Conyers, silently placed a packet and letter in her hands, took up his hat, shook hands with his friends, and went away.

"It will do no harm to follow his advice, Elfie," said Justin, touching the bell once more. "We will see if there is anything missing. If there has been a robbery, it will be clear that the strange visitor was a burglar. If there has been no robbery, there will be no harm in your going to the provost marshal and giving the information as you suggest."

Old Frederica answered the bell, and apologized for presenting herself by saying:

"If you please, sir, black Bob, he's not in a fit state to come; he's perfectly glowered with the fright."

"Never mind, Frederica; you'll do. We have reason to suspect that a robber got into the house last night. Have you missed anything?"

"Lor', sir, no—not a thing."

"Make a thorough search; and especially make a careful examination of the plate chest; and then come and report to me."

Frederica left the room to obey.

And then the group broke up.

Justin went to look to the iron chest where money and documents were kept.

Britomarte, with a face paler than usual, withdrew to examine the letter and parcel placed in her hands by the doctor.

Elfie went back to the chamber of Erminie.

Meanwhile a thorough search was made of the prem-

ises. Not an article was missing. No robbery had been perpetrated. No vestige of a robber was to be found. And the mystery thickened.

When Elfie came out of Erminie's room, she found Justin on the watch for her.

"Come here, my dear girl," he whispered, withdrawing her out of earshot of Erminie's attendants. "I am inclined to be of your opinion in this matter. The result of our investigation is that no trace of a burglar can be found. Therefore I think your conjecture as to the presence of General Eastworth in the city, and his identity with the mysterious visitor of last night, may be founded in truth. His intimate knowledge of the interior arrangements of our house would certainly favor his visiting it in that secret manner."

"When I discovered that the visitor was not the doctor, I was convinced that it was Eastworth who came. I have not had a doubt about the matter since," said Elfie.

"Then you had better come with me and give information at the provost marshal's office directly."

"Bless my soul and body! Well, I said I was willing to go, and I'll go; but now it comes to the point I don't like the office at all," said Elfie, as she hurried off to get her bonnet and mantle.

In a few minutes Justin took her out in a carriage to do the disagreeable duty he had recommended. They were gone but an hour, at the end of which Elfie returned in rather a bad humor, and Justin with a very grave face.

They had both been subjected to a close cross examination.

Elfie threw off her bonnet and mantle, and hurried into the room of Erminie, whom she found quietly sleeping.

Catherine had the watch.

"Where is Miss Conyers?" inquired Elfie.

"I don't know, ma'am. She hasn't been in this room since breakfast."

"Strange! I'll go and look for her," said Elfie, rising to leave the chamber.

But at the door she met Britomarte, in a traveling dress, and looking very pale and haggard.

"For Heaven's sake, what is the matter?" exclaimed Elfie, starting back.

"Is Erminie awake?" inquired Miss Conyers, disregarding her friend's question.

"No; but what is the matter with you, Britomarte?"

"I have had news that will compel me to leave you to-day."

"To leave us to-day!"

"Yes; but I must wait until Erminie awakes to take leave of her."

"Woman of mystery! what is your news and where are you going?" exclaimed Elfie, half in pity, half in mirth.

"You must excuse me from explaining, Elfie. You know, for I have told you, that there is a secret in my life. You must respect it," said Britomarte, gravely.

"There is more than one secret, I imagine. Well, I will respect them all, Britomarte," said her companion.

While they spoke, Erminie awoke, very much refreshed by her nap.

"How do you feel, dearest?" inquired Miss Conyers.

"Very well—full of returning life. But you—you look pale and sad, Britomarte. What troubles you?" anxiously inquired Erminie.

"The duty of leaving you immediately, my darling. No, do not say a word to hinder me, love. You know that nothing but the most absolute necessity could induce me to go now; and that I must go," said Miss Conyers, seeing that her friend was about to expostulate.

"Well, well, I must submit, I suppose! but you will come back soon?" sighed Erminie.

"As soon as possible, love!"

On her way to the library to seek Justin, she met him in the hall.

"Good-by, Justin!" she exclaimed, holding out her hand.

"What!" he cried.

"Good-by!"

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do!"

"Where are you going?"

"About my business, Justin," sadly smiled Miss Conyers.

"But—excuse me—what business?"

"That is my secret, if you please, Justin."

"Pardon my impertinence," said Colonel Rosenthal, with a mortified air; "but I hoped to speak to you, Britomarte, on that one subject which day and night has occupied my thoughts since I first met you!" he said, taking her hand and seeking to detain her.

"Let that subject rest, if not forever, at least till after the war is over."

"And then?"

"Then we may neither of us wish to resume it."

"Britomarte, are you not wantonly trifling with my happiness and yours?"

"I have no time for 'trifling' of any sort. It would be well, besides, if we thought a little less of 'happiness' and a little more of duty. Justin, my carriage is waiting to take me to the station, where I must not miss the train. Good-by!" said Britomarte, withdrawing her hand from his clasp.

"No, let me see you to the station, at least," said Justin, taking his hat, opening the hall door, and escorting her to the carriage, into which he followed her.

They caught the train just before it started.

Miss Conyers had no luggage but a hand-bag, and therefore she was the more easily enabled to get into her seat in the ladies' car in time.

Justin bade her a hasty adieu, and returned home.

* * * * * * *

As soon as Erminie was convalescent Justin took leave of her and returned to his regiment. And in the course of a few weeks, two or more of our young friends went to the front—little Mim as a volunteer, and Mr. Billingcoo as a drafted man.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

It was the night after the terrible battle of Cold Harbor. Both armies had fallen back. The dead and wounded lay where they had dropped. Among the latter was Colonel Rosenthal, who had been struck down while charging in front of his regiment. Young Wing, at the hazard of life and even of dearer honor, went in search of his colonel. Wandering in the darkness over that field of blood, he came suddenly upon a fallen horse and rider, and knew by the instinct of affection that he had found whom he sought.

"Is that you, Wing?" hoarsely whispered a feeble voice, as the young officer threw himself down on the grass.

"Yes, yes, my colonel, it is I," sobbed Wing.

"How did you find me, my boy, on this chaotic field, under this dark sky?"

"How? Oh, how does the faithful dog find his fallen master amid such confusion? I saw you when you fell. I noticed where you lay. I could not come to you in the hurly-burly of that charge——"

"Ah! a gallant charge, Wing! a glorious charge! It was fine to fall in such a charge as that!"

"Yes, my colonel. But I have come to help you now. How can I do so? Where are you hurt?" said Wing, groping about, and feeling man and horse under his hands.

"I do not know where I am hurt, Wing. But the horse has fallen on me, partly," groaned the colonel.

"Stay! if I can find a musket or a carbine—and there must be many scattered over this field—I can use it as a lever and raise the weight from you, my colonel," said Wing, moving about in search of the instruments required.

In his motions he touched with his feet what he supposed to be the dead body of a soldier. And he elicited a deep-prolonged groan.

"Ah! I am so sorry! did I hurt you?" tenderly inquired Wing, stooping to address this new claimant of his sympathy.

"Oh, no—only roused me," moaned the wounded boy.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Wing.

"Water! water!"

Wing had a canteen filled with water, and he took the stopper off and put it to the mouth of the boy, who drank greedily.

"That was good! Now I can die comfortably. Friend, are you Yank or Secesh?"

"Yank," said Wing.

"Well, never mind. What are we fighting for, I wonder? I'm Secesh. Put your hand—in my bosom, Yank. Take out a powder-flask cover that you will find there. My sister worked it and gave it to me before I left home to join the army. Keep it, Yank——"

"I will keep it for your sister and send it to her if you will tell me where she lives," said Wing.

"Her name is Ellen Jenkins. She lives——" And here the speaker's voice failed.

"She lives?" said Wing, listening attentively.

"In Rich—in Rich——" panted the dying boy.

Wing snatched a flask of brandy from his bosom and placed it to the lips of the young soldier.

Too late! There was but the gurgling death rattle in his throat. He could neither swallow nor articulate.

"Do you mean to say that she lives in Richmond?" gently inquired Wing, taking the hand of the boy, who closed his fingers upon the hand of Wing and nodded earnestly.

And the next moment all was over.

Wing sighed and turned the young soldier on his back, and straightened out his limbs and closed his eyes, placing two pennies upon the lids to keep them down.

While performing these last offices he had several times touched a carbine that lay beside the dead boy.

Now he took it up and returned to the spot where Justin Rosenthal lay partly under the burden of the horse.

"Oh, my colonel! I have been away so long! But I found a dying soldier, moaning for water, before I found the carbine. And I had to minister to his wants, and

even receive his last breath and close his eyes, before I could come back to you," said Wing.

"You were right, my boy. But now the wind has risen a little and blown the fog away. Can you see where to place the end of the carbine so as to raise the weight of the horse from my limbs?"

"Yes, my colonel, I can," said Wing, poking the end of the weapon under the body of the horse that lay directly across one of Justin's limbs, and prying it up a little way.

"There—that is already a great relief. A little higher—raise it a little higher, Wing, and I shall be able to draw my limb from under it and crawl away," said Justin.

And Wing put forth all his strength, and pried up the weight, and lifted it clear of the crushed limb beneath it, and held it so until Justin Rosenthal crawled away.

Then Wing let the dead horse drop to the ground while he rushed to his colonel.

A danger that neither had dreamed of was threatening the life of Justin Rosenthal.

It appeared that the minie ball which had killed his horse under him had also passed through his own leg, severing some important vein or artery. The dead weight of the horse falling upon this limb had closed the orifice, and stopped the bleeding. But now, at the removal of the weight, the wound burst out again, and the life-stream of the man was running fast away. He lay panting, fainting, almost dying, when Wing came up to him.

"My colonel! oh, what is the matter?" inquired Wing, in a voice vibrating with anxiety.

"I think that I am dying, Wing. But come here, boy. Come close. Stoop down and listen to me."

"But what is it? oh, my colonel, what is it? Where is your wound? What can I do for you?" wailed Wing, weeping like a woman and wringing his hands.

"I think that the femoral artery is severed, Wing, and that I am bleeding to death."

"Oh, no, no, no!" groaned Wing.

"Cease lamenting, dear boy. Mine is but a soldier's fate. How egotistical to bemoan it. Only remember, Wing, and tell my dear sister that I fell in the glorious charge of Wilson's cavalry at Cold Harbor."

"I will tell her! I will tell her! But I cannot give you up! I will not give you up! You must not die! You shall not die! Where is this severed artery? I will pinch it together with my fingers until I stop the bleeding, and I will hold it so all night and all day, and many nights and days, if necessary, until surgical relief comes to you!" cried Wing.

"Ah, my boy, you must hurry from this spot. Every hour that you stay here is fraught with death. You are actually within the rebel lines, Wing. How you ever succeeded in getting here undetected I cannot imagine, unless both chance and the darkness of the night favored you. But now, my boy, you must receive my last message for one I love, and you must hurry back before daylight betrays you to the enemy and to captivity," said Colonel Rosenthal, gravely.

"Where is your wound? oh, where? Help me to find it, that I may stanch the blood," said Wing, feeling blindly about the body of his colonel.

"Well, well, here, if you will have it. Here, in my right leg," answered Justin, in a voice that was every instant falling fainter.

Wing felt the leg of the trousers soaked in blood; he snatched his dagger from his belt, and ripped it up, so as to get to the wound. And he took his handkerchief, and bound it around the limb just above the knee, and drew it as tight as possible, and tied it fast, and so he checked the fast flow of blood.

"Thanks, Wing. Thanks, my dear boy. I think you have helped me for the present. Now hear my last message to one I love, and then turn and fly—save yourself," said Justin, solemnly.

"Tell me, then, your last message. What is it?" inquired Wing.

"Say to my beloved sister that I fell leading on my regiment in Wilson's glorious charge at Cold Harbor. Say if I could have chosen the manner of my death I would have chosen this. Bid her bestow my property on the bereaved of this war—the bereaved of both sides. For the widows and orphans and old mothers of the rebel soldiers are as much to be pitied as those of our own. Bid her, when the war is over, to open wide her heart

and home for the returning prodigals. Bid her do all she can, in her limited woman's way, to heal the wounds of the country, to reconcile enemies, and to bring back peace. And give her my love and my blessing. Will you remember to deliver all this message, Wing?"

"Oh, yes! I will! I will! But is this the only message you have to send?" sobbed Wing.

"The only one," answered Justin.

"And is there no other—no other that you remember in this awful hour—none to whom you would wish to send a parting word?" wept Wing.

"None—there is none!" answered Justin, solemnly.

"No woman as dear, or dearer, than a sister, to whom you would like to send some—some last word of love? Oh, speak, if there be, and I will bear your message faithfully, sacredly, silently, until I meet with her for whom it is intended! Oh, think! oh, speak! is there none—none but your sister to whom you would send a message?" pleaded Wing.

"There is none!" answered Justin, solemnly. "Beyond this field of blood there is none but my sister to whom I care to send a message."

Wing sat down and wept convulsively.

After a little while Justin put out his hand, and, taking that of Wing, pressed it, and drew it to his lips and kissed it, and said:

"Britomarte!"

With a violent start the hand was snatched away, but almost immediately it was returned and reclasped.

"Britomarte—now in this supreme hour—now, with my life-blood oozing slowly but surely away—with my hours, nay, my very minutes numbered—may I venture to recognize you and call you by your name? May I venture to confess that I recognized you from the beginning?" he pleaded, still holding and caressing her hand.

"Justin! Justin, my beloved! my beloved!" exclaimed Britomarte, whom we shall no longer call by her assumed name of Wing. And she dropped her head upon his bosom and sobbed aloud. He folded his arms around her, and she sobbed until her passion of grief had exhausted itself. Then she raised her head and wiped her eyes.

"I am dying, Britomarte! that is nothing; a soldier's fate—no more. But stoop, my darling, and put your lips to mine, and give me the kiss—the kiss that my heart has hungered for through all these weary years!" he pleaded.

She stooped and pressed her lips to his in long, clinging, passionate kisses, murmuring between them:

"If you die, I die with you, Justin! I cannot survive you, my beloved! I feel my heart sinking with your ebbing life! But, oh! that we had our days to live over again! oh, that we had! I would not then repulse your dear love, Justin; I would not! I would not! Ah! how could I have been so unwomanly, so inhuman, as to repel such a heart as yours. Oh, live, Justin! live, that I may undo the work of years, and make you happy if I can!"

"My dearest! if anything could make me live in this world, it would be your love, that makes me so happy. But if I die here, Britomarte, we shall live in another and a better world, where all mists shall be cleared from our vision—where we shall know each other as we are, and love each other eternally," he said, gently caressing her.

"Oh, try to live!—to live in this world yet a little while, dear Justin. There is a great deal in trying, you know. Pray to the Lord to help you! Ah, do not cheat yourself out of your beautiful youth-time on this dear earth! The other world may be bright enough, but it is not this sweet, familiar earth! Ah, try to live, dear Justin! let me look at your wound. It has ceased to ooze! it has, indeed, dear. The blood is coagulated all around the binding. You will live if you only make a strong effort," urged Britomarte.

Her words were like the elixir of life. They put new strength into the sinking man.

"If it depends upon me, my dearest one, I shall not die! I will try to live, Britomarte, since life holds out the promise of so much happiness in your love!"

"That is right! You will live! I know it—I feel it!"

"But, my darling, you must go now. Every minute you remain here is fraught with danger to your honor and your liberty. Go, dear Britomarte, go!"

"No, I will not leave you! I will stay here and watch you. And, now I think of it, you must keep your limb

perfectly still. The least motion may set it to bleeding again."

"I will, my dearest, I will. But go now—do go!"

"I said that I would not leave you, and I meant it!"

"But every moment of your stay is replete with peril to you! Squads of rebel soldiers pass every now and then to plunder the dying and the dead. And the fog is blowing away, and it is getting clearer and lighter every minute, and if they come this way and discover you, they will capture you immediately."

"So they will you, Justin, if they discover your rank. And I am resolved to stay and share your fate," she firmly replied.

"Oh, Britomarte! Britomarte! think of the horrors of Libby Prison! How could you—a woman—bear them! Reflect and fly, Britomarte! Fly, and save yourself in time!" he urged.

"If I were able to take you up on my shoulders and bear you off from the battlefield, as Æneas bore his father from burning Troy, I would do so. But, as I am not able to save you, I will stay and share your fate. 'Horrors of the Libby Prison?' Oh, Justin! there is nothing in this world so hard to bear as separation from those we love. Nothing, Justin, nothing! I know it, I feel it. I said so, Justin, when you left me to go into the army; and so I disguised myself and followed you to the field. And I say so now, kneeling by your side in this vale of blood. I am now your promised wife, and nothing on earth shall ever part me from your side unless I should be torn by violence away. If you go to Libby, I go to Libby; happier if I share your fate in that foul prison and pesthouse than I could be anywhere else on earth."

"But, Britomarte, for your own sake—for my sake!"

"Justin, my beloved, I abjured my womanhood, disguised myself and followed you to battle; I have been by your side on twenty well-fought fields; I have dared what woman never dared before that I might be ever with you! Justin, Justin, my true love! my husband for time and eternity! never again ask me to leave you!" she exclaimed, her voice and all her frame trembling with emotion.

"I will not! before Heaven, I promise it! I will never

ask you, I will never consent to your leaving me!" fervently, earnestly, solemnly replied Justin, closing his hand upon hers.

"That is well! Now let us talk calmly together, while we wait for what may happen. And now tell me, Justin, how it was that you recognized me, as you did, from the beginning? I thought I was well disguised, and I am a good actress, with almost a Protean power of changing my face, and with a ventriloquist's gift of changing my voice!" she said.

"Yes, you were well disguised! wonderfully well! You had sacrificed your luxuriant and beautiful, dark-brown tresses, and had put on a skull-cap wig of short, stiff, bristling flaxen hair, and drawn it tight and low over your forehead, making the latter much narrower than nature had formed it. You had shaved off your arched black eyebrows, giving your face the bald look corresponding to the short, stiff hair, and quite altering the expression of your eyes. You had widened your mouth by two deep hidden lines in the corner. Altogether you had made, as you women say, 'a figure of yourself,' which was not Britomarte. You had put yourself in the uniform of a United States soldier, and you always carried four or five pebbles in your mouth to make you speak thickly, like a German," said Justin.

"And yet you recognized me?"

"Yes: when I saw you in the ranks—flaxen hair, bald face, wide mouth, soldier's clothes and Dutchman's voice to the contrary notwithstanding—in the ugly, awkward little raw recruit, to my unbounded amazement I recognized my beautiful Britomarte Conyers," he answered, smiling.

Many times in her military career had Britomarte's cheeks crimsoned for her own wounded womanhood; but never so deeply as now.

"Oh, Justin, Justin!" she said, covering her face with her hands, and forgetting that he could not plainly see it in that obscure light; "oh, Justin! it was for your sake, my dearest, that I transformed and disfigured myself so."

"I know it, dear Britomarte, I know it."

"Division from your side was worse than death to me—worse than division of soul from body. I felt that I

must be with you, at all costs, but I thought that you would never find me out. I wished to serve you as a faithful little brother, with my identity unsuspected. Oh, Justin, Justin! you never misunderstood or wronged me in your thoughts after you recognized me, I know!" she passionately exclaimed.

"I never did."

"Had I known that you had discovered me, I would have vanished from your sight!"

"I know it, dear Britomarte, I know it! for I know you. There is not, Britomarte, in the universe a creature who understands and appreciates you and your motives so truly and justly as I can and as I do."

"I feel sure of that," murmured Britomarte.

Justin pressed her hand and relapsed into silence. He was really very faint and weak from excessive loss of blood; and the transient strength lent him by excitement was beginning to fail.

Britomarte took from her pocket some pieces of hard biscuit, soaked them in the brandy from her flask and put them, bit by bit, into his mouth.

When he was sufficiently revived by these refreshments, she inquired:

"Dear Justin, when you recognized me in the ranks, how was it that you did not whisper private information of the fact and get me quietly mustered out?"

"My first impulse was to do just that very thing. But I seldom permit myself to act upon impulse; and so I reflected that I had no right to betray your secret, or to interfere with your plans, or in any way invade your free agency; and I resolved to let you take your own course and to protect you in it as far as in me lay."

"Oh, Justin, dear Justin! good and true in all things, how much I——" her voice broke down and she wept.

"And now, love, forgive me in what I am about to explain to you—because, if I live, I am to be your husband, am I not?"

"Oh, yes, yes," she answered, earnestly.

"And if I die, still we are to be one forever?"

"Forever and ever!"

"Why, then, we are bound together as fast as though all the courts in the country had issued our marriage li-

cense, and all the churches in Christendom had consecrated our union."

"We are, my own dear love."

"Then you will let me speak as plainly to you as to my wife?"

"Just as plainly. Yes."

"Well, then, the very day on which you were mustered in, when I recognized you, I asked myself with a shudder: Where will she eat? Where will she sleep? With whom will she associate? How will she maintain her sacred womanly reserve in this crowded camp, where four or five soldiers occupy a tent together? And then it was that I felt the strong impulse to give private information of your sex, and have you quietly mustered out; but, as I said before, I reflected that I had no right to betray your secret, or restrain your free agency, and I resolved to let you go on your own way, but to protect you in it, and so I immediately selected you as my orderly, and assigned you to a nook in my own quarters, where your woman's holy privacy would be, and ever has been, inviolate."

"Oh, Justin, dear love, honored husband, a thousand blessings on you for all your tender care," she said, stooping and pressing her lips to his.

He put his arms around her, and she wept to feel how feeble those strong arms had become, and he fondly returned her caresses.

"Tell me, now, Justin," she said, "how it happened that you never once betrayed to me your recognition of me?"

"I have great powers of reticence and self-control. I knew that to betray my knowledge of you would be to wound your delicacy and control your actions, and so I constantly guarded——"

"Hark!" exclaimed Britomarte, springing to her feet.

"What is it?" cried Justin.

"The rebels are upon us. Justin!"

"Well, dear?"

"If they capture us, do not betray my sex to them, in any hope that they will respect it. Do not, Justin! do not!"

"Not for a thousand worlds. Your uniform is the best

protection your womanhood could have now," said the wounded man.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SURPRISE.

"These, at least, shall not be dishonored by anything done to me," said Britomarte, as, with her dagger, she hastily cut and tore the captain's straps from her shoulders, and threw them as far as she could send them.

The sky was clearing, and it was much lighter than it had been as the marauding party rode up. They dismounted at a short distance, and came prowling about on foot among the fallen, to slay the dying, rob the dead.

Britomarte knelt by Justin and held his hand as they came up, and bent over the group.

"Hullo! who have we here? A Yankee colonel, by all that's lucky. And a Yankee spy to boot. Stoop down and examine him, Canstop. If he is badly hurt, we'll put him out of his misery, and appropriate that fine suit of broadcloth that can be no farther use to him. If he is not, we'll take him prisoner and give him a taste of Libby," said one who seemed to be the leader of the squad.

"Where are you hurt?" said the man called Canstop, who seemed, from his manner, to be some lower grade of hospital nurse.

"In my leg, only, I think. I am weak from loss of blood, and stiff from certain bruises received, by my horse falling on me," answered Justin, calmly.

"All right; hand over your arms," said the leader.

"You will find my sword somewhere on the field, where I dropped it from my hand as I fell."

"Your revolver?"

"Here it is," said Justin, drawing it forth and delivering it up.

"Your watch?"

"I never before heard that watches were arms," said Justin, as he passed over his costly chronometer.

"Now your pocketbook."

Justin smiled as he answered:

"If it were not that I know you are backed up by a thousand precedents of your comrades, I should wonder that you, calling yourselves soldiers, should stoop to rob a wounded prisoner."

"Hold your noise, you blamed Yankee, and do as you're bid, or it will be the worst for you."

"I have no pocketbook with me," answered Justin, calmly; "I left it at headquarters."

"Oh, expected to be whipped, did you, and so made sure of the money by leaving it behind. Just like your Yankee cunning. Come, raise him up, some of you boys, and see if he can stand upon his legs," said the leader, speaking to his men.

Two of them lifted Justin up, but it was evident that he could not stand.

"I see," said the leader. "Lay him down again. Can-stop, haven't you got a stretcher somewhere handy?"

"Yes, under the ash tree about a hundred yards from this."

"Go, some of you and fetch it."

Two men started at a run, and quickly returned with the stretcher.

And the wounded prisoner was lifted and laid upon it.

They now had time to attend to the less important captive.

"You are not wounded, at least. What the devil do you mean by coming within our lines?" fiercely demanded the leader.

"I came to succor my colonel, and to share his fate," answered Britomarte, firmly.

"Brave boy! what is your rank among the clock peddlers?" laughed the leader.

"I am a soldier in the United States army," proudly replied Britomarte.

"Of what grade?"

"I decline to answer."

"You see 'soldier' is rather a comprehensive term. General Grant is a soldier——"

"Oh, you've found that out, have you?" said Britomarte, derisively.

"And every private in his army is a soldier——"

"Thanks. You are giving us great praise," laughed Britomarte.

"I mean, of course, as to name. You are a soldier, and I ask you of what grade?"

"And I decline to answer your question."

"All right; it is your own affair. Only if you call yourself simply a soldier, you will be treated as a soldier; that is to say, you will be put in the lowest part of the prison, and fed upon the poorest rations. The officers have better accommodations."

Britomarte trembled, not at the certainty of foul food and fouler lodging, but at the prospect of being separated from Justin. So she answered:

"As I do not wish to be divided from my colonel, I will acknowledge that I am a commissioned officer of the line, as you may see for yourself in my dark uniform."

"What is your name and precise rank?"

"I decline to answer."

"The fact is, you are a spy, but your reserve will not save you! Here, Pettigru! take his arms, guard him, and march him after the other prisoner!" said the leader.

Britomarte gave up her sword, dagger and revolver, and marched between two rebel soldiers, after the stretcher upon which four other soldiers were bearing Justin off from the field.

The leader was about to leave the spot with the remainder of the party, when he heard a weak voice calling:

"Sergeant!"

"Well, who are you? what's the matter?"

"One of your company—wounded in the hip. Don't you think you could send a stretcher and have me taken off the field?"

"I'll see. We are picking up all we can without getting too near the Yankee lines. Those devils never sleep! and we are expecting the battle to be renewed in the morning. However, I'll attend to your case."

"Sergeant!"

"Well, what now."

"You have taken two prisoners?"

"Yes; what then?"

"One was a Yankee colonel?"

"Colonel Rosenthal—yes, what of it?"

"Why, the other one, sergeant, was—was his sweetheart."

"Eh?"

"His sweetheart, sergeant."

"How do you know that?"

"Laying here in the bushes quite near them, but out of their sight, I overheard their talk—not all of it, nor half of it, for they spoke in a low tone—but I overheard enough to know that she is his sweetheart, and has served with him disguised as a soldier, for the last year or so, and that she is a commissioned officer."

"Ah-h-h, ha-a-a!" chuckled the sergeant; "that's the reason why she was so close! but her closeness shall not save her any more than her sex shall! We'll treat her as a spy. Her name, my man! did you hear her name?"

"Not the one she went by in the army; but I think he called her Bridget Martin, or some such name."

"Ah-h-h, ha-a-a! Miss Bridget Martin! I think we shall get in a little light upon you before long! I shouldn't wonder if you were the very 'orderly' of Colonel Rosenthal who penetrated the camp of the Free Sword and betrayed him. We shall see! Keep up your courage, my man; I will send the stretcher back for you as soon as it has deposited the colonel."

And so saying, the sergeant, instead of going to other parts of the field, as he had intended, turned and followed the prisoners.

The bearers supporting the stretcher upon which Colonel Rosenthal lay, moved rapidly onward over the rough ground to the great distress of the wounded man.

Britomarte was driven closely behind him—literally driven; for if, after her day and night of severe and exhausting battle and toil, her woman's fragile limbs gave way for a moment, her steps were promptly quickened by the point of the bayonet thrust against her shoulders.

So over miles and miles of broken and rocky roads they were painfully marched to the rear of Lee's army, and to an old barn that was used as a temporary depot for prisoners.

Here, to her consternation, Britomarte was thrust in with a number of fellow captives who were waiting to be

transported to Richmond, while Colonel Rosenthal was borne off to the field hospital to have his wound looked to.

There must have been more than a thousand prisoners crowded into that old barn.

Britomarte, being one of the last taken, found herself near the door. And when it was closed and barred upon her, she could get no farther. She was like a late arrival at an overcrowded lecture-room—only this crowd was all standing, because there was no room to sit or lie down. The building was broken here and there, and through crevices a little air got in; this only prevented the prisoners from being suffocated. They were a patient and silent band of victims—only here and there was heard a groan wrung from some sufferer from disease or wounds; and now and then a curse struck out from some exasperated soldier who found himself squeezed nearly to death by the crowd.

Britomarte, being small and light, sank down upon the floor, with her back resting against the closed door. And notwithstanding her great mental anxiety—worn out in body and mind, and overcome with heat and fatigue—she fell into a deep and dreamless sleep, that lasted perhaps two hours.

She was rudely awakened by falling backward. The door against which she had leaned had been suddenly opened, and she had gone over.

Half bewildered by the deep sleep and the rude shock that had ended it, she picked herself up in time to hear the prison guard shout:

"Come, get out of this, you lazy Yankees! You've got to go to Richmond—where you've been trying to get for the last three or four years, you know."

The half suffocated prisoners were only glad to get out into the open air. And though ready to sink with heat, fasting and weariness, they issued forth.

Many of them dropped down upon the ground to rest and stretch their stiff and wearied limbs, and wait for the breakfast which they hoped was coming.

But there was no such good luck in store for them. They were ordered to rise and fall in line; and when, by reason of their stiffness and soreness, they were slow to

move, they were poked and goaded up at the point of the bayonet.

Some of the younger men—mere boys, who in their comfortable Northern or Western homes, had been used to warm and plentiful meals, and even during their campaigns with the army had been provided with regular and excellent rations—could not get used to living without food and drink. So they complained of hunger and asked for breakfast.

"'Breakfast!'" was the laughing and probably the truthful rejoinder—"'breakfast,' is it? Why, we haven't any for ourselves, how can we give it to you? But cheer up, Yanks! we shall get something to eat on the road, I dare say, if it's nothing better than raw potatoes or unripe corn."

The prisoners were immediately formed in line, guarded on either side by a strong detachment of rebel infantry, and put *en route* for Richmond by one of the plank roads still covered by Lee's army.

Britomarte, consumed by anxiety for the fate of Justin, ventured to ask an officer of the guard who was marching near her, whether he was still in the field hospital, and what was his state. She spoke in a gentle and winning tone of voice, and the officer addressed happened to be a gentleman.

"'Colonel Rosenthal?" he replied. "He is in the ambulance ahead of us, with several other Yankee officers who are slightly wounded, but unable to walk."

"Is his wound a slight one?"

"I presume it is not a dangerous one, or he would have been left upon the field. We can have no object in capturing an officer who is likely to die before he can be exchanged."

And here the officer, feeling perhaps that his courtesy had gone far enough in talking to a prisoner, fell back a little out of earshot.

Britomarte felt comforted in the knowledge that Justin's wound was not dangerous, and that he was on the same road with herself, and would probably be assigned to the same ward of the same prison with herself.

When they had marched about three miles through a wasted and desolated country, they came to a cornfield,

where a halt was ordered, and the prisoners were directed to help themselves, and permitted to rest. The corn was not near ripe, the ears when the husks were removed being little bigger than a man's forefinger, and the husks still soft; and the ground was wet with the recent heavy rains. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the famished and fatigued prisoners gladly filled their stomachs with this very green corn, devouring both grain and husks; and afterward threw their wearied limbs down upon the damp ground—imprudences to be fearfully paid for in the disease and death that afterward decimated the crowded population of Libby and Belle Isle.

Having eaten and rested in this fatal manner, the order was given to rise and fall in line, and the march was resumed.

All that burning day, when "the sky was brass," they marched. Late in the afternoon they halted again in an orchard, and supped off green apples, and immediately resumed the march.

It was near nightfall when they reached Richmond.

There was a short halt, during which their arrival was formally reported to the proper authorities, and orders for their disposition taken.

And then they were marched directly to the Libby and packed into a prison that was already crowded.

For what follows I am indebted partly to personal observation, and partly to the report of an officer who was an inmate of that pesthouse for several months.

The Libby, as I saw it in May, 1865, is a great, strong, oblong building of the simplest structure. It stands quite alone, a whole block in itself, reaching each way from street to street. It fronts the water and the wharfs, and backs upon a city street, though front and back are so exactly alike that it is difficult to say which is which. It has no wall or yard around it. It stands barely and grimly out between the streets. It is of two stories, or, counting the ground floor, of three. Each story is divided, simply and equally, into three great halls, each big enough for an ordinary church, and running from front to back through the whole building. Each hall has its sides formed of solid masonry, and its ends of three immense doors, formed only of perpendicular iron bars, and

reaching from the ceiling to the floor. Through these bars at the front may be seen the sidewalk, the river, the wharves and the busy scenes of traffic; through the bars of the back a crowded city street. Through these opposite, open bars the ventilation is very good. There is neither bed, bench, water jug or furniture of any sort in either hall. But in the right-hand corner of the front there is, in each, a water-spout and sink.

So, amid all the miserable squalor and destitution of the Libby, there seemed to be three or four necessaries of life in plenty—light, air, water and an open view of earth and sky.

At least these were my impressions in inspecting it in May, 1865, nearly a year after the events I am now relating.

It was quite dark when our prisoners were halted before the Libby, but the gas lamps of the street showed the iron-barred front of the building, lined with ghastly faces looking out upon the night. Our men were suffering extremely, all from fatigue, and many from acute illness brought on by eating green corn and green apples, and marching under the burning sun. And many sat down and many dropped upon the sidewalk before the prison while waiting for the doors to be thrown open. A report went round among them that they were only to be packed up in the Libby for that night, and that next morning they were to be divided between Belle Isle and Castle Thunder.

At last the massive doors were thrown open and the prisoners were forced in—really forced, for though they made no sort of resistance, the crowd already there was so great that it formed an almost impassable obstacle to the entrance of any more. But our boys were pushed in and pressed upon this crowd, until it fell heavily back upon itself, to the risk of great injury and even death to individual prisoners. And when nearly all were in, and the crowd still bulged through the open doors, as the contents of an over-full trunk bulges through its open top, these doors were closed by main force upon it, just as you would close down the lid of the trunk.

This was not a silent and a patient crowd like that in

the barn had been. The great number of these men had suffered too long and too terribly. Their state had been bad enough before this new installment of prisoners was thrust in upon them; now it was immeasurably worse. Here were men pressed together by thousands in a stone hall that could not have accommodated a hundred in comfort—pressed together so closely that there was no room to sit or lie down.

To be sure, they had air from the open grating at each end of the hall; but the walls on each side were reeking with moisture and sickening with mould, and the ground floor under their feet was paved only with round stones like those in the middle of the streets, and was in many places worn with deep holes, where water had gathered, in which the men stood ankle deep.

Many of the men were suffering from wounds, not serious in the beginning, else they had not been brought here, but inflamed and fevered by neglect and ill treatment; many were racked with neuralgia and rheumatism from constant exposure to damp and cold; many were ill from revolting forms of disease brought on by foul food. And added to all this, all were suffering from hunger, thirst and weariness. And there was no relief and no prospect of relief.

Here, over these prison doors, might have been inscribed the awful motto over the gates of hell:

"Abandon hope all ye who enter here."

Here were agonizing groans and heart-rending prayers, heavy complainings and bitter upraidings; deeply-breathed maledictions and fiercely-muttered vows of vengeance.

The rays of a gas lamp at the corner of the street, streaming through the grating, lighted up the ghastly faces of these prisoners with a wild and lurid glare. They looked like the inhabitants of Tartarus. The place seemed at once a purgatory and a pandemonium.

Britomarte, for the first time in all her military career, shuddered with horror.

"Keep near the grating, my dearest, with your face to the bars, so that you may get as much fresh air as possible," whispered a faint voice close to her ear.

She turned quickly and saw the face of her lover, pallid in the lamplight.

"Justin! You here! You in this hall of horrors! Oh, I am so sorry!" she exclaimed, in a low and anxious tone.

"And I am so glad! And I thought you would be glad to have me near you," he cheerfully replied.

"Not here—not in this torture chamber. Oh, Justin! weak and wounded, how will you bear it?"

"Much better than I could bear separation from you, Britomarte," he earnestly answered.

"Your wound, Justin; how is it? Painful?"

"Not more so than I can well endure," he answered, smiling.

But to her wistful gaze his white lips and wrung brow almost belied his words.

"They might have sent you to a hospital, at least. It was inhuman to place you here," she said.

"But, my dearest, they placed me just where I wished to be," he cheerfully said.

And this was true, so true, that he had feigned a greater strength and a quicker convalescence than he really enjoyed, in order to be sent to the Libby.

"But how was it that I didn't see you outside?" she inquired.

"Because it was late when I was brought up. I was one of the last to be packed in," he laughed.

"'Packed in.' Yes, that is what it is. We are lucky to be near the grating; but how will the poor creatures in the middle of the crowd stand it?"

"They will not be required to do so long. This is only a temporary arrangement. I am given to understand that to-morrow morning we, the newly arrived, will be sent to Belle Isle. This will relieve the others."

While Justin and Britomarte talked together in this low tone, Babel, or rather Bedlam, was all around them. The groans rose to howls, complaints to threats, and prayers to shrieks.

One voice from the midst of the crowd arose above all the rest:

"Water, boys—for the Lord's sake, water. Here's a man fainting. The spout is in the left-hand corner, near

the front grating. Draw the water and pass it on here, will you?"

There was a muffled shuffling among the men nearest the water spout, and then another voice replied:

"The cup is chained to the spout. We can't pass it."

Groans and curses answered this.

"Here, Justin—here is the flask of brandy, with the cup fitted to it, that I brought for you on the field. Offer it to them, Justin," said Britomarte, passing the flask that the rebels had not taken from her.

From Justin it was passed on from hand to hand, until it reached the men nearest the water spout. They took the cup from the bottom of the flask, over which it was fitted, and filled it with water, and then passed both cup and flask from hand to hand until it reached the fainting invalid.

It seemed to be useless, for the voice that had spoken first was heard again:

"Crowd back, boys. Crowd back, for Heaven's sake! Never mind flattening yourselves half to death! Crowd back, I say! This man is not fainting—he is dying! Let him have a little room to lie down and die."

There was an attempt at "crowding back." The attempt involved increased pressure and pain, and elicited renewed groans and curses. But four or five feet of room was made, and the dying man was let down upon the ground. The "man" was a boy of eighteen. Those immediately around him saw his face darken with the shadow of death, saw his eyes glaze, and heard his gasping breath, and the death rattle in his throat, and they saw, through all, his eager anxiety and painful effort to speak.

"Don't tell—don't tell—don't tell——" he began to say many times, and many times he failed.

At length, in one supreme effort, he spoke his whole will.

"Don't tell mother—never let her hear—how wretchedly I die!"

And with these words his spirit passed.

And the groans and curses and vows of vengeance were renewed—more is the pity, since the pure spirit that had

just departed was doubtlessly reconciled to all things, and at peace with all men.

It was a night of horror and agony, unutterable and indescribable. To those who endured it, the eight hours of darkness seemed eight years of torture. But it passed at last.

The pale, sickly dawn of day appeared. The gas in the streets was turned off.

A little while after sunrise the prison doors were opened, and the prisoners nearest the outlet burst forth, as the contents of an over-packed chest when the lid is raised.

Half of them were taken out and marched, between a detachment of rebel infantry, through the streets of the city, *en route* to Belle Isle.

In one of the most crowded thoroughfares, they were halted before a grim-looking building with grated windows.

"What place is that?" inquired Britomarte of the rebel soldier beside her.

"It s Castle Thunder," was the gruff reply.

The officer commanding the guard came near.

"Bring that prisoner out of the lines," he ordered, pointing to Britomarte.

And two soldiers seized her by the two arms.

"Me!" she exclaimed, in surprise, making an involuntary but perfectly vain effort of resistance.

"Yes, you, Miss Bridget Martin!" said the officer.

"What are you about to do with me?" she demanded, recovering her self-possession, and ceasing to resist where resistance would be unavailing and undignified.

"We are going to put you in Castle Thunder; you are not to be treated as a prisoner of war, but to be tried as a spy."

"I!" she exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes, you, Miss Bridget Martin!' replied the officer, in a mocking tone.

Britomarte looked around in despair for Justin. She knew, of course, that he could not help her. She only wished to take leave of him before going into a captivity that was likely to end in death. But Justin was nowhere

to be seen. He was, in fact, several hundred yards in advance of her in the line of march.

So Britomarte was taken into Castle Thunder, and delivered into the custody of the officer in command of that prison. First she was led into an office, where her supposed name—Bridget Martin—was recorded in the prison books, and where a receipt was taken from the warden for her person. Then she was conducted to a cell opening on a corridor on the second floor, and having a broad, grated window looking out upon the street. This cell was about seven by five in size, and was provided with a narrow mattress laid upon the floor, and covered with a gray blanket. There was no other furniture whatever.

Yet, still, how much better her situation was here than it had been in the Libby!

As soon as the door was closed, and the key was turned, and she found herself alone, she sank down upon the mattress, for she was more than half dead with fatigue, and rested with a sense of infinite relief.

When at last she could collect her thoughts, she wondered how it was that the rebels had discovered her sex, and what had put it into their heads that her name was Bridget Martin. At last her perspicacity penetrated the truth of the matter—some wounded rebel on the field near them had overheard the conversation between Justin and herself, and had mistaken her unfamiliar name of Britomarte for the common one of Bridget Martin. Farther it appeared that they did not know the name under which she had served in the Union army; so, with a smile, Britomarte resolved to leave them in ignorance of her identity, and under their mistake in regard to her name.

She had scarcely formed this resolution when her cell door was opened, and one of the prison guards brought in her breakfast. It was only a small tin cup of Indian cornmeal gruel, and it was unsalted; but Britomarte was more than half famished, and she ate this simple food with a good relish. She asked the guard if there were many prisoners in the building. He answered:

"Yes, miss; four or five in every cell; but you are put here alone, because you are a woman."

So, then, even her guard knew her sex! But, of

course, the name inscribed upon the prison books was Bridget Martin.

She then asked the guard if she might be permitted to see the officer in command of the prison.

He answered that he would find out as soon as he should be relieved.

When he took the empty cup away, and Britomarte found herself again alone, she took off her military coat, ripped open its padding and took out a number of greenbacks; and then she put on her coat again.

Late in the forenoon the commander of the prison, or some other officer, evidently in authority, came into the cell.

Britomarte arose from her sitting posture on the mattress, and stood up to receive her visitor.

There was neither chair nor stool, so she could not ask him to sit down.

"What is it you wish to say to me?" he inquired.

A vivid blush overspread the face of Britomarte as she answered:

"I wish to know whether I may be permitted to purchase garments suitable to my sex?"

"It is a pity you ever abandoned them," said the officer.

"I do not think so; I have done good service to my country while wearing this uniform. But you have not answered the question."

"I have no authority to answer it. But I will make inquiries."

"Thank you," said Britomarte.

And the visitor, who had appeared at her summons, like a ghost evoked from the shades, now disappeared in the same manner.

Two or three days passed before the privilege she sued for was granted to her. But, at length, she was permitted, through the agency of the prison officials, to purchase clothing and reassume the dress of her sex. Also a chair was provided her, and coarse but clean sheets, for all of which she paid heavily in Federal notes; but thus she enjoyed a comparative degree of comfort.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

For many months Britomarte remained a prisoner in Castle Thunder. She was not brought to trial as a spy.

She was brought up once or twice for an informal examination before the provost marshal or some other officer in authority. But when questioned she remained absolutely silent; so that no information could be obtained from her.

And the only witness that could be found to give testimony in her case, was the wounded rebel soldier who had overheard the conversation between herself and her lover, and who swore that her name, as heard by himself, was Bridget Martin.

So, as Bridget Martin, she was remanded to prison, where she seemed likely to remain until the end of the war.

That end was not very far off. General Grant was slowly but surely fighting his way to Richmond, winding around it coil after coil of that "anaconda grasp ever tightening," that was destined to destroy the doomed Confederate capital.

In due time Colonel Rosenthal was exchanged and released, but so broken in health from the pains and privations of his captivity that, when he reported himself for duty at his brigade headquarters, he was immediately sent home on sick leave.

And there it required many weeks of Erminie's careful and skillful nursing before his strength could be restored.

During all this time Justin had been unremitting in his efforts to hear tidings of Britomarte, and to take measures for her release. But none of these efforts were successful.

It will be remembered that when Britomarte was taken from the prisoners' line of march to be cast into Castle Thunder, Justin was some two squares ahead, and knew nothing of her withdrawal.

When the party of prisoners reached Belle Isle, he looked around for Britomarte, and not seeing her, cautiously inquired among the men, who, some of them, knew her by sight, but only as "Captain Wing," a commissioned officer of his regiment.

The men could give no information, until at length the two or three who had marched nearest to her said that "Captain Wing" had been taken from the line, when they were halted in one of the streets of the city; but they could not tell where "he" had been carried.

He inquired of the guard, who remained dumb.

Then he questioned the officer of the guard, who gave him no satisfaction, but, on the contrary, turned cross-questioner himself, in order to find out who Britomarte was.

Justin saw his drift and became silent.

So his investigations ended for that time, to be renewed again and again, both at Richmond and at Washington, with no better success.

She was a prisoner in a solitary cell in Castle Thunder, where she was known only by the name which the mistaken rebel soldier had bestowed upon her; so it was not probable, or scarcely possible, that her friends should hear of her condition.

Early in January, Justin, still in very feeble health, but impatient to serve his country, rejoined his regiment. He returned to the front, in company with many officers who had been home on furlough to spend the Christmas holidays.

He found that already the spring campaign, destined to be the last and greatest of the war, was about to open.

Along the whole lines, active preparations were being made for a new combined assault upon Petersburg and Richmond.

General Grant was at City Point with the whole plan of the campaign in his comprehensive brain, and directing the operations of the whole army with consummate skill. There had been many changes in the army since Colonel Rosenthal had fought with them in the battles of Cold Harbor. Officers by thousands and enlisted men by tens of thousands, had been killed, wounded, or taken prisoners, in the scores of battles that had been fought be-

tween the Pamunkey, the Chickahominy, and the James rivers, and around Petersburg, and their places had been filled up with raw recruits. Veteran privates had developed into commissioned officers, and officers of the line had grown into regimental, brigade and even division commanders. But it was only "gallant and meritorious conduct" in the service that was thus distinguished.

For instance, little Mim, who, at the battle of the Chickahominy, in June, was only a private soldier in an infantry regiment, was now major and *aide-de-camp* on the staff of a division general, while Billingcoo, who was mustered in at the same time with Mim, remained still a very sorry soldier of the rank and file.

But then Mim was a little hero, ever foremost in the fight, by his high-hearted bravery and devotion ever inspiring and encouraging all around him, while Billingcoo, in every engagement, was flagrantly among the skulkers, and ran away and hid himself whenever he could get an opportunity to do so.

And, singularly enough, Mim, who constantly exposed himself in the front of battle, even under a storm of shot and shell, seemed to bear a charmed life; while Billingcoo, who gave his whole mind to the duty of taking care of his body, was always getting hurt. And once, while hiding behind a barn, one day, to keep out of the range of shot, he had his ear torn off by a splinter from a shell that came splitting its way through the timbers of the building.

When Colonel Rosenthal met Mim, he congratulated that gallant officer on his well-earned advancement.

"Thanks," said the little hero, drawing himself up. "I always told the recruiting officers, when I offered myself, that I could do good military service for my country, but they never agreed with me, and in the face of the fact that almost every great martial hero the world has known, from Alexander to Napoleon, was a little man, they repeatedly refused me. Yes, they refused me until things came to such a pass that for want of men they were compelled, like the feast giver in the Bible, to call in 'the maimed, the halt and the blind.' The Invalid Corps, you know, colonel. Then, at length, they consented to take me."

"And you have done good service to your country, and great credit to yourself, Major Mim," answered Justin.

With Billingcoo Justin did not happen to come in contact at all.

And now, about the last of January, the most energeitc arrangements were made to close in around Petersburg and Richmond. The whole army was in most active preparation.

The first object was to seize the South Side Railroad.

To absorb the attention of the enemy, a heavy cannonading was opened upon Petersburg, hurling an overwhelming tempest of shot and shell into the city.

Under cover of this terrific assault in the front, the sick, the wounded, the sutlers, the camp followers, with all their baggage, and all other animate and inanimate incumbrances to the movements of the army, were dispatched by railroad to City Point, and all serviceable troops and supplies were brought up and massed on the left.

As early as three o'clock on Sunday, the fifth of February, under cover of the darkness, Gregg's division of cavalry commenced its march, followed immediately by the Fifth and Second Corps. The weather was glorious, the roads in the best condition, and the men in the best of spirits.

It was rather a strange coincidence that Colonel Rosenthal's last engagement, in which he was wounded and taken prisoner, had been in a charge upon Wade Hampton's cavalry, and that his first encounter on rejoining his regiment should be with the same brave foe. But such were the facts, for they had advanced but a little way beyond Ream's Station, on the Dinwiddie Court House Road, when they were met by Wade Hampton's cavalry, with whom they had a fierce contest for the right of way before they could pass. But again they were victorious, and rushed onward like a whirlwind toward Dinwiddie Court House, encountering and overwhelming the enemy at every post along the road.

The other divisions advanced by adjacent roads running in the same general direction, battling every mile of the way.

But the great battle was fought on Monday, the sixth

of February, at Hatcher's Run, a deep stream passing through a nearly pathless wilderness, broken into fearful ravines, stagnant marshes, and heavy woods—a locality new to our soldiers, but perfectly familiar to the enemy.

Here, at length, the farther advance of our army was for the time effectually checked.

A battle was commenced early in the day, and gradually increased in violence, until at nightfall it raged with tremendous fury. Gregg's division of cavalry, and Warren's and Humphrey's corps, were all engaged. Again and again they pressed forward under a pelting shower of bullets, that fell thick, fast and blinding as a hailstorm, and again and again they were driven back, fighting desperately behind rocks, stumps and trees. So often they fought over the same ground, that the woods and marshes were strewn thickly with the dead and dying of both armies, in an undistinguishable confusion.

The circumstances were very discouraging to brave men, and very unfavorable to skulkers; and unluckily there were skulkers in that heroic army, but they were mostly to be found among the raw recruits—soft metal—that had not yet been hardened in the fires of an hundred battles.

From time to time staff officers were sent out, like whippers-in of hounds, to hunt up these heroes and hurry them to their line.

Major Mim, being an active, energetic little fellow, was dispatched on just such a duty. In the course of his ride through the wilderness he came upon Billingcoo lurking in a thicket.

"Get up and go to your company, sir," said Mim.

"Oh, I can't! I can't, indeed! Hear how the thots are cracking and thnapping about! And look how the men are dropping! Oh, the poor fellowth! oh, the poor, dear fellowth!" whimpered Billingcoo.

"For shame, sir! Get up, and go and help the 'poor fellowths' you profess to feel so much sympathy for," said Mim.

"I can't! indeed, I can't! The bulleth hurt! they do, indeed, mathor! And the rebelth fire without the thlighteth regard to a man's life! Oh, look how they

are falling! Oh, poor fellowth! oh, the poor, poor fellowth!" howled Billingcoo.

"The brave fellows, you mean; get up and imitate them."

"Oh, I couldn't! I couldn't for my life! I thould be thertain to be killed! The rebelth fire tho carelethly, not minding who they hit! I feel I thould be killed!"

"Suppose you are killed, you poltroon! what of it? A man can die but once!" exclaimed little Mim, thoroughly provoked.

"I tell you I've died a thouthand death thinth I've been in the army! I've died a hundred death thinth I've been in thith thicket!"

"And you'll die a hundred thousand more if you do not get over your cowardly fears! Look at that young fellow there!" said Mim, pointing to a young officer at some distance who, with sword in hand, was gayly cheering on his men to the conflict.

Billingcoo looked; but at that moment a shell came tearing and splitting its way through the woods, and when the smoke cleared away, a horrible picture was revealed between its rifts. The young officer stood in the same attitude, with his sword drawn and held at arm's length over his head, but his whole face was blown off, and nothing but a gory, crimson, quivering mass of flesh remained where it had been. For only an instant he stood thus, and then fell.

Billingcoo uttered a cry of horror and deadly terror, and threw himself forward upon the ground.

Even Mim shuddered, and covered his eyes for a moment, but then recovering herself, he looked up and said:

"It is all over by this time; the brave young fellow is out of his misery. Come, Billingcoo! I have been sent to hurry up all laggards. Get up! Pick up your musket and march!"

"I tell you I can't—there! and I won't, neither—there! Do you think I want to have my fathe blown to pieth like that young man'th! I say I can't and I won't go! I am religiouthly oppothed to war!" answered Billingcoo, lifting his head for a moment, and then letting it fall.

"You say you can't and you won't! Well, I say you must and you shall!" exclaimed Mim, goading the sides of the prostrate coward with the point of his drawn sword.

"Oh! look here now! That hurth! Thtop that!" cried Billingcoo.

"Get up then, and go to your company!" said Mim, goading him more pointedly than ever.

"Oh lor! oh dear! oh me! call this a free country indeed! Thtop that now, will you! It hurth, I tell you!"

"Get up, then!" repeated Mim, digging at him again.

But at that moment a minie ball came whizzing toward them, piercing the leg of Mim and killing his horse, which instantly fell under him; so that both rider and horse rolled on the ground.

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Billingcoo. "I don't bear you any ill-will, old fellow; but I do think it therveth you right, and I do thank the goodneth grathiouth alive for thith great deliveranth!"

And he jumped up, cut three or four capers in the air, and ran farther away out of gun-shot; for the battle was now surging nearer and nearer to them.

Every one knows that on that night our army was beaten back to their intrenchments upon Hatcher's Run, where they made a final stand.

The next day, when the wounded were looked up, Mim was found with his leg hurt beside his dead horse. And some distance further on Billingcoo was found dead—transfixed with a splinter driven into his body by a shell that had torn its way through the old log cabin behind which the poor creature, with his usual fatality, had hidden himself in fancied security.

Our army were now in undisputed possession of Hatcher's Run. And the City Point Railroad was in good working order up to this post.

But, as every one knows, it was three weeks later, and after almost incessant fighting along the White Oak Road, culminating in the terrific battle of the Five Forks, that the South Side Railroad was at length seized and destroyed, the Confederate army totally routed, and the way opened to the occupation of Richmond and Petersburg by our troops.

It would be presumptuous in a mere story-writer to dwell upon these magnificent themes, so much beyond her power of treatment. This story does not pretend to be a history of the campaign or of any portion of it; it is only a simple narrative of the part taken therein by certain persons in whom we are interested. And besides, it would be useless to dilate upon events that are still fresh in the memory of all. All recollect—how from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Lakes to the Gulf—how all the land rang with joy, how all the cities glowed with light, how all the banners waved in triumph—when the vibrating telegraphic wires flashed East and West—flashed North and South—the proud words:

"Richmond and Petersburg are ours! One third of Lee's army is destroyed. And for the rest there is no escape."

And yet, even among the most loyal of the Union party, mostly among them perhaps, was this joy mingled with sadness, for they were no alien foes that our arms had vanquished.

CHAPTER XL.

DELIVERANCE AT LAST.

Britomarte, for many weary months, remained a captive in Castle Thunder. The tediousness, the heaviness, the wretchedness of this captivity, who can imagine?

She was more than a suspected spy in the hands of the enemy, and as such, she was only saved from the usual fate of a spy by that consideration for her sex which restrained her captors from putting a woman to death for anything less than a capital crime proved upon her—not by circumstantial evidence, but by direct testimony.

Yet was her captivity even more bitter and terrible than death. She was debarred from books, newspapers, companionship, and from conversation, even with her guards. She could get no intelligence of her friends or her country.

Whether Colonel Rosenthal had recovered, or had died

of his wounds, or whether he had been exchanged, or was still a prisoner at Belle Isle, she could not surmise.

Whether General Grant had crossed the James and invested Richmond, or whether the Army of the Potomac had again been beaten back to Washington, she did not know.

Occasionally, from the shouts that filled the city streets by day, and the lights that illumined the city windows by night, she conjectured that a Confederate victory had been gained, or a false report of such a victory spread.

These were her only sources of even conjecture.

In solitude, in silence, in idleness, in close confinement, intense anxiety and maddening suspense, the heavy days and nights, the horrible autumn and winter of her captivity crept slowly into the past. For months her brave soul bore nobly up.

But as the spring opened, bringing life and light and beauty to all the earth, but no ray of joy, or hope, or comfort, into her prison cell, her body, soul and spirit all broke down.

These were the darkest hours of her long dreary night of misery, but like such hours, they fell just before the dawn of her new, sweet day of joy.

It was the ever memorable second of April, eighteen hundred and sixty-five. Up to this day, the great Confederate capital had continued confident in its own fancied security, and even now it was as utterly unconscious of its fast approaching capture, as was the solitary prisoner in Castle Thunder of her quickly coming deliverance.

It was Sunday, and the sweet Sabbath peace reigned over the city.

Britomarte sat at the grated window of her cell, as she had sat—how many heavy days and sleepless nights! She was almost as fleshless as a skeleton, as bloodless as a corpse, and as hopeless as a lost spirit. She had been listening to the solemn Sabbath bells calling the citizens to their afternoon worship; she had been watching these citizens, both male and female, young and old, troop past, in their quaint, faded and old-fashioned apparel, that the severity of the blockade compelled them still to wear,

and she had been wondering wearily at the strange self-delusion and inconsistency which permitted these people to collect and pray like Christians in their churches, and to muster and make war like heathen upon their brethren.

But now the bells had ceased to ring, the churches were filled, and the streets were empty. Her head dropped upon her hand, and she sat in dull despair, while the hours crept slowly by, and the sun sank slowly to his setting.

Then the cry of her heart went up:

"'How long, O Lord, how long?'"

Not long now, oh, pale prisoner! "The day of the Lord is at hand, at hand." The sun has set for the last time upon the rebel capital. To-morrow it will rise upon a redeemed city.

Even now Lee's army is in full retreat. And those Sabbath bells you lately heard ringing summoned, among others, one worshiper to church who, ere he left his pew again, received a telegram announcing, in effect, that his reign was over and his city about to be taken.

Even now the trains of cars at the station of the Richmond & Danville Railroad are seized for the use of the Confederate President and his retinue, who are about to fly from the falling capital. Breckenridge and his army have received orders to evacuate Richmond by midnight; but he has resolved to leave behind him a tremendous token of vengeance by destroying the city that they could not hold. There is an ever-increasing noise and confusion throughout the city, though as yet people are kept in ignorance and do not know what all the excitement is about.

Britomarte, sitting at the grated window of her prison cell, and, seeing the crowds hurry through the streets, thought at first that they were the congregations dismissed from the several churches.

But as the crowds became multitudes, and the confusion became uproar, she began to think that news of some great battle had been received; but whether the people were howling over a defeat or hurrahing over a victory, she could not discover.

While she was enduring this suspense, the door of her cell was unlocked, and the guard, or turnkey, who at-

tended her, brought in the cup of unsalted cornmeal gruel that formed her usual supper.

For months she had ceased to speak to her guards because they had been forbidden to hold any conversation with her. But now the unexplained uproar of the whole city, the excited looks of this man, and her own intense anxiety, irresistibly impelled her to question him.

"What is the matter outside?" she eagerly inquired.

He hesitated a moment, glanced at her anxious countenance, and then, with a harsh laugh, he answered:

"Don't you know? The Army of the Potomac is utterly destroyed. Grant and all his generals are taken prisoners and are on their way to the city. And the mob means to lynch them, if the President and the general don't prevent it."

"My God!" exclaimed Britomarte; and the cup of gruel fell untasted from her hands.

Having told this bitter falsehood, the guard picked up the fragments of the broken cup, and, laughing sarcastically, left the cell, and locked the door.

Britomarte remained with her hands lifted in appeal to Heaven.

Did she then believe the terrible tale? Not entirely; nor did the mocking guard expect that she would do so.

But she was enfeebled and enervated in body and mind by her long solitary confinement; and she succumbed to the shock of that announcement before she could reflect upon its improbability.

When, however, she had time to recover her composure, and to arrange her thoughts, she perceived that the guard had gone too far in hinting that the mob proposed to lynch the illustrious prisoners said to have been taken. And in utterly rejecting this part of the story as impossible, she was led to question the whole of it as improbable. Though this conclusion saved her from despair, it did not moderate her anxiety.

She pressed her face to the bars of her prison window, and watched and listened with "all" her eyes and ears to discover if possible the true cause of all the uproar in the city.

The night was now quite dark, or would have been so but for the gas lamps at the corners.

A torrent of human beings rushed through the streets, a confusion of many tongues rose on the air.

"What can be the matter?" she asked of herself for the hundreth time. "If there really should have been a recent Confederate victory, as the guard stated, I shall soon know. In that case there will be an impromptu and partial illumination to-night, and a concerted and general one to-morrow night."

But the hours crept on toward midnight, and there was no illumination.

Meanwhile the multitude of people, ever increasing in number and gathering in force, continued to roll on like a river with resistless impetuosity through the streets; and the babel of many voices to whirl like a tornado in a ceaseless roar up into the midnight air. Yet these voices were not the utterances of victors; these fierce invectives and deep maledictions were not exclamations of joy or triumph!

What could be their purport then?

Britomarte could not answer. She could only watch and listen in intense anxiety and awful suspense.

At length the bell of some neighboring public building tolled.

And simultaneously with this knell there rolled up into the cool night air, against the clear, purple sky, a huge, black, crimson and sulphurous volume of smoke!

The illumination was about to appear, but not in the character she had expected to see it.

This was fire, she knew, but whence or where she knew not. She could only watch and listen as before.

The black and crimson smoke speedily burst into flame, an all the earth and all the heavens were lighted up as by a general conflagration.

So might have belched forth the subterranean fires of Vesuvius upon the doomed cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii.

Viewed from her window, the scene was wild, splendid and magnificent beyond description. Against the broadening sheets of flame the city buildings stood up black, stark and spectral, while all the crowded streets between them formed a Pandemonium.

The ocean of fire rolled on and on. Every nook of the

city was intensely illuminated. The inside of her own cell was so dazzlingly lighted up that she had to close her eyes, at intervals, to relieve them of the blinding glare. And the sea of flame rolled on and on!

And the horror was presently augmented, when, with tremendous reports that rent the air and shook the ground like an earthquake, magazine after magazine exploded, sending blazing timbers, bricks, mortar, and every description of ignited missile, whirling through the city; while a driving shower of sparks and burning coals fell like the rain of fire that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah!

"Grant is before the inner line of intrenchments, and is shelling the city," was the natural conclusion of Britomarte, as she heard the detonating thunder of the frequent explosions, the dreadful crash of falling buildings, and the fierce cries of the infuriated mob; she saw the flood of flame and the rain of burning coals.

"And when he takes the city, at what a stupendous cost of life. It will be utterly destroyed, with all its people. And we, the Union prisoners, will find our only deliverance through a death by fire."

And Britomarte sank to her knees, and covered her eyes, and bowed her head and prayed—not in fear for herself, for she was brave to meet the fire, but in pity for the innocent children, the delicate women, the suffering invalids, and all the helpless and harmless that she thought must go down with the strong and the guilty in this general destruction.

Long and earnestly she prayed to the Lord of heaven and earth to mitigate the horrors of this most horrible night.

When at length she arose, and looked out upon the burning city, she beheld a scene which, in its sublime terrors, overwhelmed her senses, and brought to her appalled soul the vision of "that dreadful day, that day of wrath," when the firmament shall melt with a fervid heat, the heavens be rolled together as a scroll, and the sun, moon and stars be blotted out.

The flood of flame rolled and roared on and on with devouring fury; the rain of fire and burning cinders fell thick and blinding as a hailstorm. And the explo-

sion of shells, torpedoes and powder magazines still rent the sky and shook the earth. And the groans and the curses of men, and the shrieks of women and children, filled the air!

Overcome with horror in her weakened condition, she who had often led the charge in person to the very cannon's mouth, now shrank away, covered her face with her hands, reeled and fell on her prison floor in a deadly swoon.

In a mercifully permitted unconsciousness, she lay for nearly two hours.

When she recovered day had dawned, and the unhallowed glare of the conflagraiton was fading in the blessed beams of the rising sun.

There were no more explosions. The supposed bombardment seemed to have ceased. And with its cessation, the shower of sparks, and burning cinders, and the whirling storm of fiery missiles had passed away. The flames still raged and roared up into the sky, but they did not seem to spread, and they looked paler and less terrible by daylight. There was still a multitudinous sound of many feet and many tongues in the streets, but the character of these sounds had changed. They were eager, joyous, triumphant!

Stiff and sore, bewildered and confused, she arose and went to the grated window, and looked forth.

Oh! joy! joy! joy! Deliverance at last? The street was filled with a procession of dark figures, but these figures wore the blue uniform of the United States soldiers! She recognized them. Her regiment had stood beside them on many a well-fought field, and last of all at Cold Harbor, where she had been taken prisoner! They were a detachment of the colored soldiers forming Weitzel's Division of the gallant Ninth Corps.

And they were about to open her prison doors!

Now, while they halted in the middle of the street in front of the prison, they were hailed and welcomed with tears and praises by the colored population that filled the sidewalk.

They were officered by young white men. One of these attracted Britomarte's especial attention. He was a gallant little fellow, full of fire, spirit and vivacity. He was

mounted on a fine horse, and rode hither and thither, maintaining order among his excited soldiers and their overjoyed friends.

Britomarte knew him, or had known him, as little Mim, and he had known and admired her, but only as Miss Conyers. Afterward, when she was known as Captain Wing, and he as Private Mim, she had recognized him again, but he had not identified her in her new character. At the battle of Cold Harbor, where she had been taken prisoner, he had still been a private. Now, however, he wore the uniform of a commissioned officer, though of what grade she could not, from her point of view, determine.

She seized the bars of her grated window, and shook and rattled them; she put her wasted hand through them and waved it; she called and shouted, but her voice was weak, and the din below was deafening; so that she failed to attract attention until Major Mim, happening to look up, saw the wasted hand waving through the grated window. He did not recognize Miss Conyers then, but he saw that the pale hand belonged to an imprisoned woman, and that was quite enough to fire the blood of such a devoted "squire of dames" as Major Mim.

Calling to four or five subordinate officers to follow him, he entered the prison. There were none to resist him. The guards had run away hours before.

Britomarte, in her cell, heard the rushing footsteps of her deliverers. They spread themselves throughout all the lobbies of the prison.

But the squad led by little Mim came hurrying toward her door, and paused in much excitement before it. This door was locked and barred on the outside, and it required some little time and force before it could be broken open.

Then Major Mim, with his face fiery from exertion and excitement, rushed in.

"You are free, madam!" he exclaimed, lifting his cap to Britomarte, but failing to recognize her.

"Don't you know me"—she hesitated a moment to glance at his straps and ascertain his precise rank—"Major Mim? Don't you know me?"

"Heaven and earth! It is Miss Conyers!" exclaimed little Mim, in consternation.

"Or what remains of her," added Britomarte, with a wan smile.

"In the name of Providence, how came you here?" demanded Mim.

"I was taken as a suspected spy. The story is too long to tell you, major. But tell me news of our army, I am dying, yes, dying, to hear."

"We have got Richmond," said Mim.

"I see that. But Colonel Rosenthal?"

"He is with General Grant."

"And General Grant?"

"Is gone after Lee."

"And Lee?"

"In full retreat down the valley, half his army destroyed, the other half doomed."

"So Richmond is ours. Thank Heaven! But, oh, why did you set the city on fire? Was that necessary?"

"We set the city on fire! No, thank Heaven, Miss Conyers, the crime of burning this beautiful city does not rest on our souls. It seems to have been set on fire either by the evacuating party or by the excited mob, we do not know which, but we do know that when we marched in we found the city in flames, and that our first business was to go to work, as fast as we could, to put it out. And, although the wretches that fired the city also cut the hose, we are still, by the blessing of God, bringing the flames under."

"Thank Heaven for that! Tell me more news of our friends. Who has fallen? Who survive?"

"Miss Conyers, it seems to me, speaking broadly, that all who are not killed are promoted. Among the killed, Miss Conyers, is that gallant young fellow they used to call the 'Destroying Angel,' on account of his fiery impetuosity."

"Who?" inquired Britomarte.

"You know—he who was so adored in the whole brigade. What was his name again? I am the worst hand at names. I seem to get the idea without the word. What was it again? Bird?—no. Dash?—no. Spring?

—no. But it was something with a rush in it. Wing! That was it. Ah, poor fellow!"

"What of him?" inquired Britomarte, suppressing a laugh.

"Missing—missing for nearly a year past. Dead, of course; lost among heaps of dead in the trenches, or the rivers, or the woods, or in the ditches of the rebel prisons. Colonel Rosenthal has done all he could to discover traces of his fate, but in vain. And I really think the uncertainty wears upon the colonel."

"Perhaps Wing may yet be found in some of the rebel prisons of Richmond," suggested Britomarte.

"Heaven grant it. Yet it is not likely. Come, Miss Conyers; you look worn and wasted. Let me take you somewhere where you can be comfortably lodged and refreshed. Colonel O'Neill has his quarters at the Goldsborough House. His wife is with him. I know they will gladly welcome you. Will you let me take you there for the present?"

"Thanks, yes! Anywhere—anywhere—out of this horrible place!" said Britomarte.

Major Mim ordered an ambulance brought up, placed Miss Conyers in it, and conveyed her to the quarters of Colonel O'Neill, where she was warmly welcomed and affectionately tended by that gallant officer's amiable wife.

CHAPTER XLI.

AFTER A WHILE.

Let us reverently pass over that awful calamity of April the fourteenth, which followed so swiftly upon the winged feet of Victory, quenching all her lights of joy and of triumph in darkness and in blood. The nation's holy sorrow is too sacred a subject to be treated here.

I take up my story at a point of time some weeks later, when the unnatural and over-strained excitement of alternated joy and grief, triumph and despair, had in some measure subsided, and the amazed and distracted people had in some degree recovered self-possession and calmness; when the victorious legions of the army had

passed in grand review before the President and all the high official dignitaries of the Union, before all the resident representatives of foreign courts, and, above all, before the multitude of grateful and admiring fellow-countrymen, who had gathered in millions to do honor to their patriotism, courage and devotion, and who, as they looked upon those glorious veterans, thought that if every man of the rank and file was not a commissioned officer, nearly every one of them certainly deserved to be so.

Promotions were made for "gallant and meritorious conduct in the service"—that is, so far as there should be room for them. But if every private soldier of the Union could have been advanced according to his deserts, we should have had an army composed almost entirely of major generals. There were thousands upon thousands of men in the ranks, as brave, as true, as skillful and as devoted, as many who commanded divisions and corps; and if these could not all be promoted it was only because, as I once heard a schoolboy captain demonstrate to his discontented company, "All cannot be corporals." But if we cannot decorate every brave soldier with a pair of shoulder-straps, we can at least give every one of them our heartfelt honor and esteem. As for us, we never see the dear old faded blue uniform anywhere, but our hearts warm to the wearer, as we think of the marchings and fightings, by day and night, the fastings and vigils, the wounds and illnesses, the exposure to freezing cold and burning heat, and all the inconceivable sufferings incident to war which the soldier must have borne for our sakes.

But this is a digression, and we must get back to our story.

It was only a few days from the grand review. The armies had been disbanded and sent home. The multitudes of visitors had left the city. And Washington, which had for weeks been suffering under a plethora of population, was relieved.

The parsonage, which like every other private house in Washington and Georgetown had been filled with company, was now comparatively empty.

The parlor circle consisted only of Erminie, Elfie,

Brigadier-General Rosenthal, Colonel Fielding and Captain Hay.

Lieutenant-Colonel Mim and Captain Ethel were frequent visitors.

By this you will perceive, that all our friends of the army who had not been killed were promoted.

They were not yet mustered out of the service, and they were all on duty in Washington.

Poor young Wing was supposed to have died in one of the Confederate prisons; but it was noticeable that from the time General Rosenthal learned of the liberation of Miss Conyers from Castle Thunder, he ceased to mourn the untimely fate of Wing.

Britomarte was not in Washington, and no one knew exactly where she was at this time.

Immediately after her release from Castle Thunder she had written three letters—one to Justin, announcing her safety, one to Erminie to the same effect, and one to the Signora Adriana di Bercelloni. And within a week after the posting of these letters she had left Richmond for the North. Lately she had written from New York, announcing her speedy return to Washington. This letter, which was addressed to Justin, was immediately answered by a joint one from the brother and sister, entreating Britomarte to make the parsonage her home, and to let them know exactly by what train she would arrive, that they might meet her at the station. They were now waiting her reply.

It was yet early in the day, and the gentlemen had all walked out, and Elfie was busy at her favorite pastime of decorating the drawing-room with flowers, and Erminie, having issued all her domestic orders for the day, was resting in an easy chair in her own chamber, when the sound of wheels was heard turning into the gates and rolling up the avenue toward the front of the house. It was not an unusual sound, for there had been a great number of callers within the last few weeks, so that in fact the inmates of the cottage were getting tired of them.

Elfie, pausing in the act of arranging a bouquet, uttered an exclamation of disgust and wondered why people could not content themselves at home.

Erminie, seated in her resting-chair in the privacy of her own room, hoped that the visitor might be no one whom she should be obliged to see. And she waited for the appearance of the servant to announce the name of the newcomer.

But fifteen or twenty minutes passed and no servant appeared, though the carriage still remained standing before the door.

"It is some one for Elfie," said Erminie to herself, as she sank in her chair to take her ease.

But at that moment she heard footsteps approaching the chamber, and the next instant the door was thrown open by Elfie, who, pale and faint, tottered into the chamber and sank into the nearest seat.

"Elfie! Elfie, my dear! in the name of mercy, what has happened?" exclaimed Erminie, starting up in alarm, for the least terrible of her conjectures was that some serious accident had occurred to her own brother or to Elfie's father.

"Noth—nothing has happened! Nothing bad, I mean! All good! Oh, Erminie! how shall I tell you?" gasped Elfie, bursting into a passion of hysterical tears and sobs.

The excess of joy weeps; the excess of anguish laughs.

"What? What is this? Who came in the carriage?" breathlessly gasped Erminie, turning pale and cold, yet not with fear.

"Oh, Erminie, guess! try to guess! I am afraid to tell you! Who would you rather see of all the world?" said Elfie, trembling.

Torrents of fire and of ice alternately seemed to sweep through the system of the delicate girl, as the blood rushed to her head and receded to her heart.

"My father! It is my dear father!" she cried, as she started up and dashed from the room.

"Yes, it is he!" said Elfie.

The drawing-room door stood wide open. Erminie flew in and was folded in the arms of her father.

He sank down on the sofa and drew her on his lap; and she dropped her head upon his bosom and wept for joy.

And he clasped her in a closer embrace, and for the

first few minutes not one word was spoken between them.

Then the first syllables her lips could frame were of gratitude to Heaven.

"Thank the Lord! Oh, thank the Lord!" she said.

"Amen," solemnly responded the Lutheran minister.

"My father! Oh, my beloved father!"

"My dear, dear child!"

"Let me look at you! Is it you, indeed? Is it indeed you?" she said, raising her face from his bosom and pushing his head gently a little way from her that she might examine him at will.

"You see it is I," he said, smiling.

"But how thin you are! oh, how thin! how wasted your dear face is! Father, you have suffered!" she said, kissing him tenderly and repeatedly.

"But my sufferings are over now, dear child," he said.

"You have been all this while in a Confederate prison! And it will take time to restore you."

"Yes, my child, it will take as many weeks and as many new-laid eggs to build me up as it took to restore the renowned knight of La Mancha after one of his campaigns," said the old man, gayly.

"You suffered so much in that prison! But don't try to tell me about it now," she added, hastily; "tell me what I shall do for you first. Have you had a good breakfast this morning? Shall I ring for Bob to bring you a pair of slippers and get a warm bath ready for you? Which first, dear father? Oh, I am not in my right senses! I am mad with joy, or I should know what to do at once without asking you. Let me take off your boots like I used to do!"

And she would have gone down on her knees to perform this service if he had not prevented her.

"Stay, my daughter. Sit where you are for the present. On my lap. I like you here. I want to look into your face. And I want nothing more just yet. Changed, my Minie! somewhat changed you are in these four years. Not so bright and blooming as you were; paler, thinner; but more lovely, my darling—much more lovely. Ah, I know how you have passed these years, my Minie. Even in my distant prison I heard of that young Luth-

eran Sister of Christ whose tender mercies were over all sufferers that came under her care—whether rebel or loyal. I will tell you about that presently. But now tell me: how knew you so readily that I had been in prison all this while? Who told you?"

"No one, my dear father. When I heard from Elfie that you had returned, I easily divined it. Where else should you have been living all this while, not to have come home to us? But, besides that, dear father, several months ago, nearly a year ago, indeed, when my brain and nervous system were in an abnormal and exalted condition from the effects of illness and drugs, I had a dream or vision in which I saw you in prison."

"Dream? vision? My child, you surely do not attach any importance to such very natural phenomena?"

"I don't know; I will tell you all about my strange experience some day—not now. I will only say this now: that my dream left upon my mind so strong an impression of your continued existence in this world that I was more overjoyed than surprised when Elfie came to announce your return. And now that I see you before me, and hear you admit that you were a captive confined in a Confederate prison, just as I dreamed you were, I cannot help attaching some significance to my dream."

"A mere coincidence, my little daughter. Millions of dreams amount to nothing. But if one in a billion seems prophetic from an accidental coincidence, it is immediately set down among supernatural phenomena. Nonsense, my Minie! The wonder is, not that one dream in a billion happens to coincide with something in real life, but that nearly all of them do not. So you have been a little Sister of Charity in these years, my Minie?"

"Yes, my father; but there was really no merit in that. My heart would have broken else. I had to comfort others in order to sustain myself."

"Did you, then, suffer so much, my Minie?" tenderly inquired her father.

"Not more, nor so much as many thousand women have suffered during this war. But I believe that I was weaker than others, and more ready to succumb to sorrow, if I had not kept myself up in the way I did. First there came—— But I will not talk to you of these things

now. Father, dear father, you know—how much do you know about Justin?" she asked, after some embarrassment and hesitation.

"I know all about him, my dear child. I parted with him not an hour ago, at his headquarters. I had to go there first, for there was one with me who had important business with him. On reaching the city, I and he who was with me inquired for Colonel Rosenthal's address, and were told that General Rosenthal was at his headquarters. So we went there, and spent two hours with him."

"My brother must have been—tremendously astonished and overjoyed."

"He was, my darling. Justin is a stout man, and in the last four years he has grown stouter. But when he saw me he was nearer swooning than I ever saw a man in my life. He first arose to receive me, believing me to be a stranger, but when he recognized me he turned white as death, reeled, caught the edge of his table for support, and fell back into his seat. It was a full minute before he could recover himself and welcome me. You sustained the shock with more firmness, my Minie."

"Because, dear father, it really was no such great shock to me. I say, as I said before, that my dream had prepared me for your return, and I was more overjoyed than surprised at it."

"Still 'harping' on your dream, my darling. Never mind that. You have suffered a great deal in these four dreadful years, my poor child."

"But I suffer no longer, dear father. I have you and I have Justin, and even my school friend, Britomarte, all safe. And I have not a sorrow in the world now," she said, gaily.

"Not one, my Minie?" he inquired, very significantly.

The fair, bright face was suddenly overclouded and darkened. The one unforgotten name arose to her lips. She covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

"I thought so. I thought so, my child. But I did not mean to torture you in vain. Hope, hope all things, my Minie," her father said, as he drew her closer to his heart, and soothed her gently.

Presently she raised her head, and wiped the tears from her eyes, saying:

"How weak and foolish I am. How wrong and thankless to weep when I should only rejoice. And I do rejoice.

"Oh, my beloved father, I rejoice from the bottom of my heart, and thank the Lord from the depths of my soul that you have returned to bless us with your precious presence. I do, father, I do!"

"I know you do, my darling, only you would be still more joyful and thankful if there could be one other by my side as loyal as I am."

"Oh, my dear father," said Erminie, shrinking painfully, as one who had a wound suddenly probed—"my dear father, do not speak of that. Never mind me. Let us talk of yourself. Since you will not let me do anything for you but sit upon your knee, tell me, if it will not tire you to do so, how it came about that you were reported dead, and that a body was found and buried as your body, when in fact you were only taken prisoner? And above all, how did it happen that you were kept in prison so long without being exchanged, or being allowed to communicate with your family?"

"It is a long story, my child, but I will try to tell it briefly. When my regiment was at Manassas, it was desirable to ascertain the position of the enemy, and the character of his defenses. My colonel knew that the general officers were very solicitous upon this point. He thought secretly to procure the information, and to surprise them with it. He proposed to me to exchange my uniform for the clergyman's dress that I had a right to wear, and in that costume, and with a bundle of tracts in my carpet bag, to penetrate the enemy's lines as an itinerant preacher, distribute my tracts, pick up all the information I could get, and then return to my regiment and give it to him."

"Oh, my dear father, what a dangerous service to put you on, and at your age, too!"

"My dear, we thought my age and clerical character would be the very circumstances to save me from suspicion and arrest."

"And so you went?"

"And so I went—myself and my colonel being only in the secret! In my character of an itinerant preacher, I succeeded in getting within the enemy's lines, where I distributed my tracts among the soldiers, and preached pro-slavery from the text, 'Servants obey your masters,' and secession from another text, 'Come out from among them.' I gained 'golden opinions,' and what is more, such important information in regard to the strength, position and plans of the enemy that, could I have succeeded in carrying it back to my colonel, it must have totally changed the issue of that disastrous battle of Buil Run."

"But you were taken?" sighed Erminie.

"I was taken! I started on my return, but some circumstance, of I know not what nature, excited suspicion. I was followed, arrested and brought back."

"Oh, my father! oh, my dear, dear father!" exclaimed Erminie, clasping her hand.

"My child, you see me sitting here in safety; you feel my arms around you; therefore you can bear to hear some hard facts. I will tell them as shortly and plainly as possible. The result of my arrest was that I was tried as a spy and condemned to die."

"Father! father!" exclaimed Erminie, clasping him closer, as though he were still in danger.

"Here I am, safe and well, little daughter! I owe my life to General Eastworth! His services to the cause of the Confederacy were considered very great; his influence was almost unbounded. He recognized me as soon as he saw me, and without divulging my real name, which was not yet discovered, he intervened at the proper point of time, and got my death-sentence commuted to that of imprisonment during the war. I was sent to a Confederate prison in Charleston."

"And it was there I saw you in my dream," murmured Erminie, but in a voice too low to attract the attention of her father, who continued:

"I verily believe that Eastworth procured me to be sent to Charleston so that he could watch over me, and mitigate the rigor of my captivity, for he himself had just been ordered on duty thither. And he has served me like a son for more than three years."

"I am very glad to owe this deep debt of gratitude to General Eastworth," said Erminie in a low voice.

"You will be gladder still to learn that Eastworth, like the Prodigal Son in the Scriptures, has come to himself!"

"Father! father! is this so? Is this really so?" gasped Erminie in a low, breathless tone, as of suspended rapture.

"It is so, my girl, or I never would have brought up his name! There is not a man in the country who mourns with a deeper sorrow over the fatal madness of the secession than does General Eastworth. And not that the cause is lost! for I feel sure that he would not only have mourned, but despaired, could it have succeeded."

"Oh, father! father! I never expected to be so happy in this world, or scarcely even in heaven, as you have made me with this news!" exclaimed Erminie, as a ray of almost divine joy shone through the tears that filled her eyes.

"I rejoice in your happiness, my darling child!"

"But how came this great change about, my father?"

"Who can tell that? Perhaps your tears that ever fell, your prayers that ever rose for him, were effective! Perhaps your devotion to the sufferers by this war brought a blessing on your head, and grace to him, so that he was cured of his hallucination; for it was hallucination with him. The wisest and best of mortal men, Erminie, are subject to be hallucinated by some master passion. With one man it may be love; with another jealousy, hatred or revenge; with still another, avarice; and with the nobler sort of man it is, too often, ambition! With Eastworth it was ambition that warped his reason and silenced his conscience. And this was not a narrow, personal desire for his own individual aggrandizement, but a comparatively broad, unselfish aspiration, for the establishment of his own section of the country into a nation, as opposed to the whole country. In this he forgot, for a time, the interests of humanity, the interests of posterity, all bound up in the preservation, intact, of this Union."

"But he remembers this now?"

"He remembers this now! Let me be just to Eastworth! It is not, I say, the failure of the cause that has

brought about this change in him. I have seen a great deal of him in the last two years. This change has been gradually coming over him in all that time."

"But, father, dear father, he has laid himself liable to heavy penalties of I know not what weight."

"He has, my dear, but he is prepared to meet them like a man."

"His property, his liberty, even his life, is forfeit to the country, is it not?" inquired Erminie, growing pale, as for the first time she remembered his danger.

"My child, perhaps so, according to the strict letter of the law! But I do not think the people of this country will have it so! There is no reason on earth why we, the free and enlightened people of America, should follow the precedent afforded us by the mingled fear and cruelty of the old world monarchies. We are too brave and strong to be vindictive and despotic."

"But what will Eastworth do, father?"

"In the first place, he will not expatriate himself. Be sure of that. He will trust himself to his country as a son to his mother."

"And you think I have no reason to fear for him."

"None; the names of some of the noblest among the Union officers are pledges for his future good faith."

Erminie heaved a sigh of infinite relief, and then said:

"But we have talked so much of him, and so little of yourself, dear. How was it, precious father, that you never let me know that you were living?"

"My darling, the conditions of the commutation of my sentence from death to imprisonment were that I should hold no communication whatever with my friends across the lines. Even Eastworth, who did all that was in his power to mitigate the severity of my fate, could not aid me in evading these conditions, without a breach of trust. That was why I could not write to you."

"But I should have supposed some one of our men in the hands of the Confederate authorities as prisoners of war, might have heard of your captivity and reported it"

"That was not likely. I was in a solitary cell, and confined under the name in which I had been arrested. No one but Eastworth knew my real name. And at my

desire, he kept it a secret. You heard me say just now, my dear, that the fame of the little Lutheran Sister of Christ, who ministered to the sick and wounded, whether loyal or rebel, had reached even me in my distant Southern prison?"

"Yes, dear father."

"I will tell you how that was. I once had a guard that was so very kind to me, so extremely kind to me, that I one day asked him plainly why he was so. He answered that he had been a wounded prisoner in the Douglass Hospital at Washington, and that a young Union lady had saved his life by her constant attentions to him, and by bringing him nice broths, jellies, fruits, wine, tea and coffee, such as, at that time, could not be furnished to the soldiers."

"Yes," said Erminie, "that must have been before the Sanitary and Christian Commissions got into operation."

"Do you remember this case, Erminie?"

"Dear father, there were so many such cases! I don't remember this particular one."

"He remembers you. As long as he lives he will remember you! He talked to me about you. He described your looks and manners and tone of voice. He told me your name, and said that you had lost your father in the first battle of Bull Run. He said that he should always be kind to the Union prisoners for your sake. I longed to tell him that I was your father; but I could not do so without disclosing my name, which I wished to keep a secret—which then more than ever I determined to keep a secret."

"But why, dear father?"

"Why—for your sake more than for any other reason, my Minie!"

"For my sake?"

"Ay, ay! listen. You had mourned me as dead. Time and religion had reconciled you to your loss, and softened your sorrow. But suppose you had heard that I was living, and suffering a painful captivity in a Southern prison? Would not all your wounds have been torn open afresh, and kept open? Would not your heart have bled both day and night? Could you have done your daily duty in the hospitals with the image of your father a

captive in a Confederate prison ever present to your mind?"

"Oh, no, no, no!"

"Therefore, you see I was right in keeping the secret, and I kept it religiously until the capture of Charleston."

"That was several weeks ago?" said Erminie, interrogatively.

"By which you mean to ask why I did not hasten home immediately on being released from prison. The reason was this, my Minie. Almost simultaneously with the capture of Charleston I was seized with typhus fever. I was ill some weeks. A man of my age seldom recovers from typhus fever; and even when he does he takes a long time to rally. As soon as I was able to travel I set out for home. General Eastworth came with me, to take care of me."

"General Eastworth here—here in Washington!" she exclaimed, slightly starting, flushing and paling.

"Yes, my Minie, and only waiting your permission to see him."

"Oh, how shall I meet him? how must I meet him, my father?"

"As your true heart dictates, my child."

She bowed her head and covered her face with her hands.

"Why do you weep, my Minie?" her father asked, tenderly caressing her.

"I do not know. My heart is heavy with its burden of happiness! Oh, my father, lay your hand upon my head and pray for me!—pray for me and bless me! I am weak, and I tremble with my happiness! I am afraid —to be so happy!"

And she shivered.

He smiled and laid his hand upon her head; he prayed for her and blessed her, then he stooped and kissed her, and arose and placed her gently in the chair, and leaving her alone, stole silently from the room.

When Erminie looked up her father was gone, and her lover stood in his place.

Pale, silent, sorrowful, mutilated, General Eastworth stood there, looking down upon Erminie.

Her hands flew out to meet him.

"Oh, welcome! welcome! welcome!" she exclaimed, with all her heart's warmth welling up in the words.

"You welcome me, Miss Rosenthal! You welcome me?" he whispered, in tones scarcely above his breath.

"With all my heart and soul! A thousand, thousand welcomes!" she cried, with almost overpowering emotion.

"I come to you, Miss Rosenthal, to hear you confirm, if you will, the gracious words you spoke to me on your bed of illness near death, that night I came to your room at the risk of my life!"

"Then that was no dream! you were really beside me there!" she exclaimed, wonderingly.

"I was really beside you there. Did you doubt it?"

"I was so ill that night I never could feel certain of what happened. And no one was able to assure me upon all points. But sit down! oh, sit down! How pale you are. You are not fit to stand!" she said.

"No, I am more fit to kneel to you," he answered mournfully.

But she arose from the great arm-chair, and with gentle force, compelled him to seat himself in it. Then she drew an ottoman forward and sat down at his knees, as she had been accustomed to do in the early days of their betrothal.

"I am so happy to have you here—oh, so unspeakably happy to have you here! I never hoped to be so happy in this world again!" she fervently exclaimed, as she placed her hand in his.

"What a welcome!" he said, as the tears rose to his eyes—his eyes that were all unused to such moisture. "What a welcome, and how unworthy I am to receive it! Do angels always welcome returning sinners so, Erminie?"

"Please do not speak of yourself so to me; to anyone else you like, but not to me! I am your betrothed, and I will hear no ill of you, even from your own lips."

"No, no, Erminie! no, no, you angel girl! I have not come to bind again upon your young life bonds that were well broken years ago! I have forfeited all right to such great happiness! All that is changed!"

"But my heart is not changed," she murmured in a low tone, and blushing deeply.

"My sweet child! when we were first betrothed I was twenty years older than you; although being then in perfect health, I did not seem so. And my wealth was great, my social position high, and my name honored. Since that time all is revolutionized with me."

"But not with me; I am the same," she murmured.

"Look at me, Erminie! See what time, toil, care, war, grief, pain, remorse have done for me. I am old and gray and broken and mutilated," he said.

"But I love you," she replied.

"To-day I am a poor and penniless man. To-morrow I may be an exile, or a prisoner."

"But I love you," she repeated.

"And see— I am maimed! I have lost my right arm. And, worse than all, I have lost it in a bad cause!"

"Poor right arm! I would I could give mine to restore it," she said.

"And, oh, Erminie! my once spotless name is stained with reproach. Could you bear to wear it?"

"Yes, for I love you! Oh, my dearest! I have but that one little phrase to answer all your words—'I love you!' Oh, my betrothed, I love you!"

He caught her in his arm, he strained her to his bosom, he burst into tears and wept over her as only a strong man can weep.

"And, oh!" he cried, "what shall I render unto the Lord for all His loving kindness and tender mercy, in giving me this dear woman's heart?

For only Heaven
Means crowned, not humbled, when it says 'forgiven!'"

So these two were reconciled, and this was but the forerunner of a deeper and broader reconciliation yet to come.

General Eastworth, by the earnest request of Dr. Rosenthal, remained as a guest at the parsonage.

At five o'clock in the afternoon Justin came in, accompanied by Mim and Ethel. And a very pleasant dinner party closed the day.

It was very noticeable that Elfie, who had now nearly

completed her first year of mourning, received young Ethel's attentions with less of reserve than formerly.

Colonel Fielding certainly smiled on the young naval officer's suit.

"Beyond my real esteem and admiration of the young fellow, and aside from my interest in my daughter's happiness and well-being, I have really a selfish motive for wishing to promote this marriage," the colonel said, in explanation to Dr. Rosenthal.

"And what may that be?" smiled the doctor.

"Why, as Elfie is my only child, I naturally feel a very great reluctance to parting with her. And as Ethel will be at sea more than two-thirds of the time, Elfie will be left with me. There! am I a selfish old dog? I cannot help it! The old widowed father of an only daughter is very apt to be so," said the colonel.

The morning succeeding the domiciliation of General Eastworth at the parsonage, Erminie received a telegram from Britomarte, announcing that she would arrive by the seven P. M. train from Baltimore.

And at the appointed hour Justin and Erminie went to the station to meet her.

The train was up to time, and Britomarte was soon fondly received by the brother and sister, who took her at once to their hearts and home.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WOMAN'S DEAREST RIGHT.

The morning of the next day found Justin and Britomarte seated together on a sofa in the drawing-room.

"Well, my dearest," began Justin, in a low tone, as he took her hand and tried to catch her eye, "is Britomarte prepared to ratify in Justin's favor the promise made by Wing to his wounded colonel?"

"Yes," she answered, frankly, "for it was a promise given unconditionally and for all time."

"And how soon shall it be redeemed, Britomarte?"

"As soon as you please—after you have heard some-

thing that I have to tell you. Justin, you have heard a 'secret' in my family history darkly hinted?"

"Yes; and I have heard you plainly assert that such a secret existed. And I have told you that, let it be what it might, it could not affect my love and esteem for you, or my earnest desire to make you my wife."

"Thanks, warmest thanks for your generous trust in me, Justin. The secret, indeed, was none of mine; nor has it turned out to be so dark an one as I had dreaded. Fortunately it cannot affect us in any manner. But you shall hear it, if only that you may know how it was that I grew up to be a man-hater!"

"I always supposed that there must have been some deep wrong and suffering at the bottom of all your man-hatred."

"A long succession of wrongs and sufferings! But you shall hear," she said. "There really would seem to have been a spell laid upon the women of our race; for as far back as we can follow household history, every woman of our blood, from mother to daughter, has married miserably."

"I hope that your marriage will break the spell, Britomarte."

"I know that it will, dear Justin. But this curse really followed or seemed to follow us from generation to generation."

"And is there no tradition connected with it?" smiled Justin.

"None. Why?"

"Because there ought to be, you know. I am afraid your family are not inventive, Miss Conyers. For this is just such a case as requires a tradition to explain it. And such a tradition could be so easily invented, to tell us what ancestress, by what crime, entailed the curse upon all her female descendants. For instance, the tale might run: How in the dark ages a certain fair nun of your race broke her vows of celibacy in favor of a certain gay knight, and in becoming his wife, by that law of retribution which visits the sins of the parents upon the children, entailed upon all her daughters to the end of time the punishment of misery in marriage. You are sure there is no such legend?"

"Quite," said Britomarte, smiling. "And for the want of such a legend in explanation of the mystery, I was obliged to seek the solution of the problem in the inherent wickedness of men. When you hear the rest of my story you will see how I found it there."

"I can even now see that, Britomarte."

"You will excuse me from speaking of my grandfather and my father, though I remember both perfectly well."

"Certainly, dearest, I understand. Whatever a man's faults may be, it is not for his descendants to discover them to others."

"No. But nothing shall prevent my speaking of my brother-in-law. I had one only sister—the daughter of my mother's first marriage, for my mother was married twice. This sister was sixteen years old and I was four when our parents died and we were left to the care of a grand-aunt."

"Miss Pole?"

"Yes; but she lived in Washington City then, and saw a great deal of company, and kept open house. My half-sister was wealthy, having inherited her father's fortune, which was secured to her; I was perfectly penniless, for my father had unfortunately run through every cent of my mother's little property. While my sister lived single, I never knew a want. But she married—married miserably, like all her foremothers had done. Her husband was the celebrated tenor, Adriano di Bercelloni. She heard him sing at an opera, fell in love with him, became mad, blind, desperate, threw herself in his way, went everywhere she could see him, and finally attracted his attention. Mona was very beautiful as well as very wealthy, and very much in love with the fascinating tenor. The bait was tempting, the opportunity good, and so the spendthrift opera singer ran away with the rich heiress."

"Poor, infatuated girl!"

"Oh, she did but follow her fate, as all her predecessors had done before her. But the rage of Aunt Pole was beyond all description. Justin, I have seen something of war, but I have never seen anything so terrible, so horrible as that old lady's roused wrath!"

"I can well believe it. I have seen her once," thought Justin to himself.

"She stormed and raved and foamed. She forbade me, on pain of her everlasting vengeance, ever to see, speak of, or think about my sister. I think the root of her bitterness grew in this fact—that she had to leave her handsome city house, which really belonged to Mona, and to break up her showy establishment, which she could no longer support on Mona's ample fortune. She sent me to school at Bellemont, and she returned to Witch Elms, breathing maledictions upon all the world."

"So that was the secret of her misanthropy."

"Yes."

"Go on, dear Britomarte."

"I went to school, but I could not obey my aunt in regard to my sister. I loved Mona; I had no one but her to love, and all the affections of my heart were concentrated upon her, I could not refrain from writing to her. I knew that Bercelloni was singing in Paris. I wrote to my sister, inclosing my letter to him. In that manner a correspondence was commenced between my sister and myself, which was kept up until her death."

"She is dead, then?" said Justin, gently.

"She has been dead five years. I will tell you all about that presently. In a very short time Bercelloni contrived to run through all my sister's fortune, wasting it upon wine, dice and other abominations. And then he left her."

"The base villain!"

"He did but carry out the curse, as all his predecessors had done before him. For more than a year I had not heard from my poor sister, when one day, while still at school, I got a letter from her, post-marked New York—a letter telling me that Bercelloni had left her, that at the time of his marriage with herself he had another wife living, although, of course, she had not suspected it—telling me also that she was in great destitution, that her three children were all ill with diphtheria, and that she had no money to buy them food or physic, and asking me, for Heaven's sake, to send her something to keep her little ones from dying of want."

"Oh, my dear, what a sad trial for your young heart to bear."

"No," said Britomarte, "it was only the family fate. But, oh, where was I to get money? I had not a dollar in my purse; I had no jewelry or trinkets such as girls usually have; I had not even a watch; I had only a little gold thimble, the birthday gift of my sister years before. It had cost six dollars. I sold it for two to a schoolmate. I also sold all my clothing, piece by piece, to the colored people of the neighborhood, so that I had but a single change left. I had to do all this secretly, and at the risk of discovery and expulsion from the school. But by the sacrifice of effects worth perhaps sixty dollars I realized about twenty, which I sent to poor Mona."

"Ah, Britomarte! To have had the heaviest burdens of life forced upon you when you were a mere schoolgirl!"

"It was the family curse. The women, like the mules, had to bear all the burdens, and like the scapegoats, had to carry all the crimes of the men."

"That is all past now, Britomarte—forever past. You shall bear no burden, suffer no sorrow that I can intercept and take from you."

"I know it, Justin, I know it. God make me worthy of you, and grateful for your love."

"Hush, hush, my dearest. No more of that. Go on with your domestic history. What came next?"

"What came next? Ah, Justin, the money I sent poor Mona only helped to bury her children. They all died. Meanwhile, she found a friend in the widow of the elder Bercelloni. This poor woman had been the second wife of the father, and was therefore only the step-mother of the son. She was entirely dependent on her own exertions for a livelihood, for her selfish stepson would do nothing for her. But the signora kept poor Mona from starving, and after a while procured her an engagement at the same opera house where she herself was employed as chorus singer. But I weary you with these petty family details."

"No, no, not in the least. All that in the slightest degree concerns you interests me. Go on, pray."

"I heard but little of my sister for the next twelve

months. Meanwhile—but how is it that secrets transpire, Justin, do you know? And above all, how is it that family secrets always come out in an exaggerated form and distorted shape? Can any one tell?"

"Not I, at all events," said Justin, smiling.

"My sister's story transpired, but in a monstrous form. There was sin and folly, it was whispered, but the folly and the sin were hers, it was said. Suspicion fell even on me, of I know not what fault. Ah, you know the poisonous malaria of slander that hung like a pestilential cloud over me."

"I know! I know! But it has cleared away, my dear —cleared away, and left your sky all bright and sunny."

"For a year or more, being my last year at school, I lived in this deadly atmosphere. Then came the school examination. You remember all that happened there?"

"I remember one thing that happened there distinctly —I met you. And for the first time, and for the whole of my life, I loved. But proceed, my dearest."

"Do you remember while we were on the boat, waiting for her to get up her steam, that a negro boy came running down from the school-house, and jumped aboard and handed me a letter?"

"That letter! Yes, and I remember your excessive agitation, your retirement to your cabin, your isolation all that day and night, and the awful sorrow on your brow next morning. I remember all, Britomarte."

"That letter was from the Signora Adriana di Bercelloni. It announced to me the news of my sister's awful death. She was found one morning dead in her bed, with her throat cut from ear to ear, and lying in a pool of her own blood!"

"Great Heavens, Britomarte!"

Britomarte covered her face with her hands, and remained silent for a few moments. Then she looked up and said:

"Do you wonder now at my strange demeanor on that occasion? You remember that on my arrival at Washington, instead of going to Witch Elms, I hastened immediately to the station to catch the train for New York?"

"Yes."

"I reached the city the next day, and hurried to the humble lodgings of the signora and got her to accompany me to the house of my dead sister, where the coroner's inquest was still sitting. There we found the Signor Adriane di Bercelloni under arrest and under strong suspicion. There, partly from the information given me by the signora, and partly from the evidence elicited by the coroner's inquest, I learned these facts: That my sister had recovered her health and beauty, and had made considerable progress in her art and in the favor of the public, so that at the time of her death she was one of the most attractive singers in the house. Bercelloni came to fulfil an engagement there that summer, and to his amazement found Mona a member of the company and restored to all her pristine bloom and beauty, and indeed more lovely and alluring than he had ever known her to be."

"Sorrow does sometimes give a last, perfecting touch to beauty," said Justin.

"Yes. Bercelloni seemed always to have loved my sister by fits and starts. Now he took a violent fancy to her—a fancy that was stimulated by jealousy into a keen vitality. But while she was very gracious to every other member of the troupe, she would not vouchsafe a word or a look to the man who had so basely deceived and deserted her."

"She was right. Her course was the only correct one."

"Yes, but it maddened him. He fiercely claimed her as his wife, haughtily asserted a husband's rights over her, and absolutely forbade the manager of the opera-house to pay her salary to herself! He told her that the story of his having had another wife was a mere canard; that there was no truth whatever in it; that he had only invented the tale to tease her."

"The monstrous villain! Who could believe him?"

"Not she, at all events. She denied his statements, ignored his claims, and defied his anger. He become furiously, frantically jealous. And such was the state of affairs between them, when one morning she was found in her bed, and weltering in her blood, as I said. The coroner's inquest, with the usual perspicacity of such bodies, found their verdict, 'Suicide.' And as a melan-

choly case of 'suicide' it was recorded in the daily papers."

"Oh, Britomarte! to think that you should have had this great sorrow, and we who loved you should have known nothing of it! Why, it is even probable that I may have read that very paragraph describing the 'melancholy case of suicide,' without the slightest suspicion that it was in the least degree connected with your life. But tell me, how in the name of justice and common sense did Bercelloni get off so easily?"

"Oh, he proved an *alibi* by half a dozen witnesses."

"Then, after all, he did not commit the crime?"

"Yes, he did, but by another hand. He was just the sort of Italian villain to hire a low ruffian to do the deed he feared to attempt. And that was the way in which he managed it. Listen, Justin: At the time that I came down to Washington on my way to the Rainbows, I went over to Witch Elms to see my old aunt, to explain to her why I went to New York so suddenly, and to ask her why she had not answered my letter in which I had broken to her the news of Mona's awful death. When I reached Witch Elms the very first person whom I saw, the man who opened the door for me, was—Dole, the confidential servant of Bercelloni. His sudden appearance nearly deprived me of my breath. I could not understand why he, of all men, should be there, of all places. But he took my message to the old lady, and while he was gone I went to the kitchen and asked the old cook, Nan, how this man came to be there, and in what capacity he served. She told me that her mistress had advertised for an overseer for her farm, and that Dole had answered her advertisement, and had offered himself and had been accepted, and, moreover, that he had already obtained a great influence over her mistress."

"Was this person you speak of a very large man with a very small head, closely cropped hair and closely shaven face?"

"Yes; why?"

"I saw him one night when I rode out to Witch Elms, to inquire for you, that is all! Go on, dearest."

"Old Nan had scarcely finished her account of Mr. Dole when that gentleman returned to me with the in-

formation that my aunt would not see me, and with my unopened letter in his hand."

"What a strange old soul!"

"Well, Justin, I will not weary you with the repetition of all my attempts to see my old relation. They were quite fruitless. She knew that my sister was dead, and how she had died. She knew all that from the public papers, but that did not melt her. She remained obdurate to the last. Patience, dear Justin! My long, dark story is almost at an end. I am about to give you the sequel of all this."

"Go on, my dearest Britomarte, and believe that I am listening with the deepest interest and closest attention."

"I pass on to the week of her death. I was here at the parsonage helping to nurse your sister at that time, you remember?"

"Certainly."

"The doctor came one morning and announced to me the death of my aunt, and placed a packet in my hand. It consisted of a half-dozen newspapers, with certain passages marked in them. There passages related to the arrest, trial and execution of a guerrilla named Norse, *alias* Dipper, *alias* Dole. It was stated that he had confessed to having committed nine highway robberies, seventeen successful burglaries, and five murders. With these papers there was a written manuscript and a note. The note was from the chaplain of the prison in which he was confined. It was addressed to Miss Pole. It explained that the accompanying manuscript was the attested confession of the prisoner. Justin, I have that document by me; would you like to look at it?"

"Not now, dearest; I would rather you would tell me its contents. What did the dying culprit confess?"

"First to having murdered 'Madam Mona,' as my sister was called, for the sum of a thousand dollars, paid him for the service by the Signor Adriano di Bercelloni."

"Horrible!"

"Then to various other offenses which would have seemed like felonies, except by the side of that one enormous crime."

"You left the parsonage soon after the receipt of that packet?"

"Yes; I could not maintain my self-possession sufficiently well to make me serviceable in a sick room. So I hastened back to my regiment to lose the keen sense of sorrow in active military service."

"Oh, my dear Britomarte, your experience of men has indeed been very bitter!"

"So bitter—so stringent, Justin, that it contracted and warped my judgment, until I attributed to your whole sex and follies and crimes that I had found only in the evil men immediately about me! And not only in my own generation, and in my sister's life, but in the lives of my mother and my grandmother. Yes, Justin, it is true this strange chain of coincidences has run through many ages. If all the women of my race had been like me—proud, defiant, high-spirited, the phenomena might have been easily explained. It might have been said that they were a race of viragos who had nothing better to expect than misery in marriage. But this was not the case, at least with my immediate foremothers. No gentler women ever lived than were my mother and my grandmother."

"But, Britomarte, those gentle women, by too deep a submission, ruin their domestic happiness as often as the high-spirited do by their resistance. Men are not gods, dear love, and so they are very often spoiled by women. But there is no danger of your spoiling me in that manner, dear Britomarte," laughed Justin.

"Indeed, there is not," she answered. "And for this reason—because you would never abuse the power that the law gives you over the outer circumstances of your wife's life, or that she herself gives you over the inner world of her affections."

"I think you do me justice, dear."

"Ah, Justin, I grew up both in feelings and in principles a man-hater. My narrow personal experiences gave strength, bitterness and intensity to my feelings, and the frequent discussion of the topic of the day, 'Woman's Rights,' gave form, shape and consistency to my opinions. And I became a very perfect man-hater."

She paused and looked at him.

He was contemplating her with deep tenderness, but he made no observation, and she continued:

"It was at this very flood-tide of my young soul's life that I first met you, Justin. And soon, to my consternation, I found that I—a pledged man-hater—was loving you, Justin! loving you with my whole heart, just as all the women of my race had loved men, to their own destruction. How I hated and scorned myself for this love! how I struggled against it, battled with it, trampled on it, tried to tear it up, root it out, and utterly destroy it, you well know."

"Ah!" smiled Justin.

"Because, you see, I did not believe in man's love. When you said to me, 'I love you—I want you for my wife,' I interpreted your words to mean just this: 'I like your looks, and I want you for my slave.' Can you wonder that I resisted my own love and resented yours?"

He did not answer. He was still contemplating her with ineffable tenderness and infinite love. And as she met his eyes, her own softened, beamed and dilated, her cheeks and lips glowed, and her whole countenance grew beautiful and radiant from the soul's inner light and life.

"But, oh, Justin!" she murmured, "as my knowledge of you grew, and my love deepened, what a change came over my spirit! First I learned that, though all other men might be false and base, you were true and noble. Next came the lesson learned on the desert island, where I found from experience how utterly helpless woman was without her brother man. I saw that though in civilized countries, which men had already made habitable for women, by the building of cities, houses and roads, the manufacture of furniture, clothing and utensils, and the promotion of arts, sciences and education—a single woman might live well enough; yet, in a wilderness, where nothing had been done—where there were no habitations, no manufactures, no planted crops—woman could not possibly exist without man; though he might live without her. This was a humiliating truth to the proud man-hater; but it was truth, and as such she accepted it."

"But man would have no motive to live or to labor, if it were not for his sister, woman," answered Justin.

"Then," she continued, "the war broke out. And that glorious, awful trial brought out all the grandest traits

of manhood—his patriotism, courage, fortitude, self-devotion—until, oh, Justin, from being a man-hater, I have almost become a man-worshiper!"

"No, don't!" he said, laughing gayly, catching her hand and pressing it to his lips; "don't do it! In great seriousness, I shouldn't like that. Of the two extreme alternatives, I would rather you should continue to be a man-hater, with a single exception in my favor."

Britomarte smiled at this speech. And before the smile had left her lips, Elfie opened the door; but, seeing them alone, was about to close it again, when Britomarte called to her:

"Come in, Elfie."

She entered, saying:

"There is a couple out in the hall, inquiring for General Rosenthal. They are on their way to the North, but have stopped till the next train for the sake of calling to see the general."

Justin immediately went out into the hall, where he found Tom and Judith.

They were looking remarkably well, and the Irish woman was eager in her expressions of joy at seeing her old friend, and anxious in her inquiries about Miss Conyers. Justin stepped to the drawing-room door and called Britomarte out.

And there ensued a meeting a great deal more noisy and demonstrative, if not so deeply emotional, as any we have recorded.

Judith and Tom had made money enough in the war to cover twenty times over their losses by Monck's capture of their wagon. And they were now going to New York to start in the grocery and provision line of business. Their time was limited and they soon took leave, amid the kindest wishes for their future welfare.

Since Britomarte's arrival at the parsonage, she had noticed that Elfie often looked at her with very roguish eyes. So the first time she found herself alone with that wild young woman, Miss Conyers said:

"Now, I want you to tell me what that means? Out with it, Elfie."

"I must! I can't keep it any longer! I want to tell

you that I knew, if anybody else did, who was the spy that penetrated into the camp of the Free Sword!"

"Oh, Elfie, speak no more of that! It was a stern military necessity, but it will ever remain with me, one of the darkest memories of the war!"

"How many names and how many wigs had you, Britomarte—Wing, Dill, Gill? You were a very pretty boy in the blue-black curled wig, as Dill; but you were a hideous little fellow, in the short-cropped flaxen wig, as Wing."

"Elfie," said Miss Conyers, very seriously, "Dill is missing and will never be found. Wing is dead and buried. Except yourself, there is but one person in this world who knows my identity with those two names. How you have discovered the secret I do not know! But I must put you on your honor to respect it."

"Here!" said Elfie, lifting a Bible from a centre-table, "I will bind myself by a solemn oath never to mention it again to any living soul! not even to Ethel, my betrothed! not even to you! Will that satisfy you?"

"Perfectly, my dear," answered Miss Conyers, kissing Elfie.

* * * * * * * *

One month later there were three weddings at the parsonage.

Captain Ethel and Elfie were married and sent off to Colonel Fielding's renovated home at Sunnyslopes, to spend a short honeymoon. And it was agreed that during Ethel's absences at sea, Elfie should reside there and keep house for her father, and that should be Ethel's "anchorage" whenever he should be ashore.

General Eastworth and Erminie were united, and started at once for his home in Virginia, where it was arranged that Dr. Rosenthal should join them, with the intention of residing with them, and helping them in their efforts to restore order and industry in their own section of country, and to promote peace and good-will between the North and the South.

Justin and Britomarte were the third couple wedded. It was decided that they should reside at the parsonage until Justin should be mustered out of the service. They went on a short tour through the Northern States; but re-

turned in time to celebrate the great Thanksgiving of that year at home. The very next morning after their arrival, as they were seated together, Justin took up the morning paper, where, among other interesting items, he saw the advertisement of a celebrated lady lecturer, who was announced to deliver a discourse at a certain church that evening, on the great subject of "Woman's Rights."

"Ay, by the way! How about woman's rights, now, sweet wife?" said Justin. as he called her attention to the advertisement.

"While I live," answered Britomarte, "I will advocate the rights of woman—in general. But for my individual self, the only right I plead for is woman's dearest right—to be loved to my heart's content all the days of my life!"

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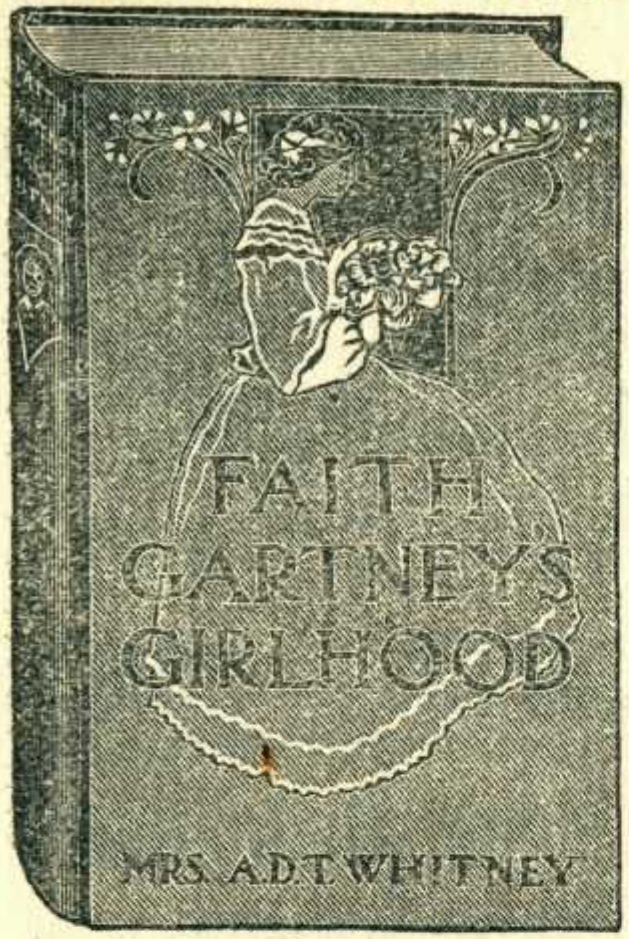

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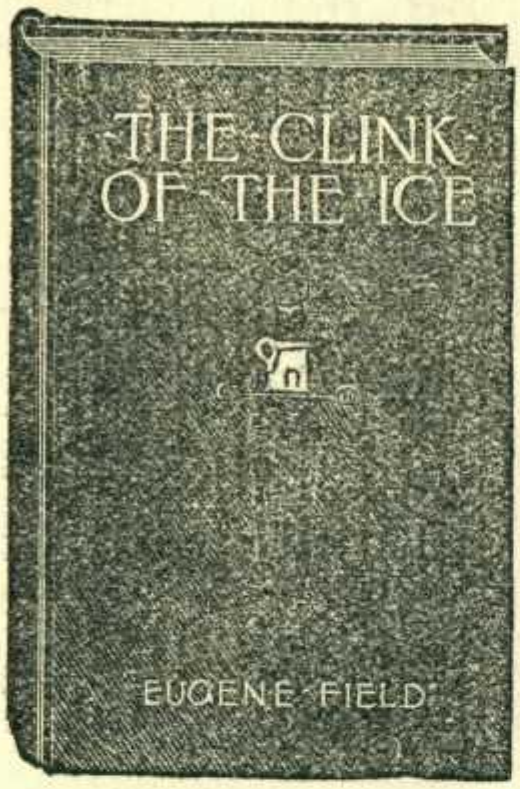

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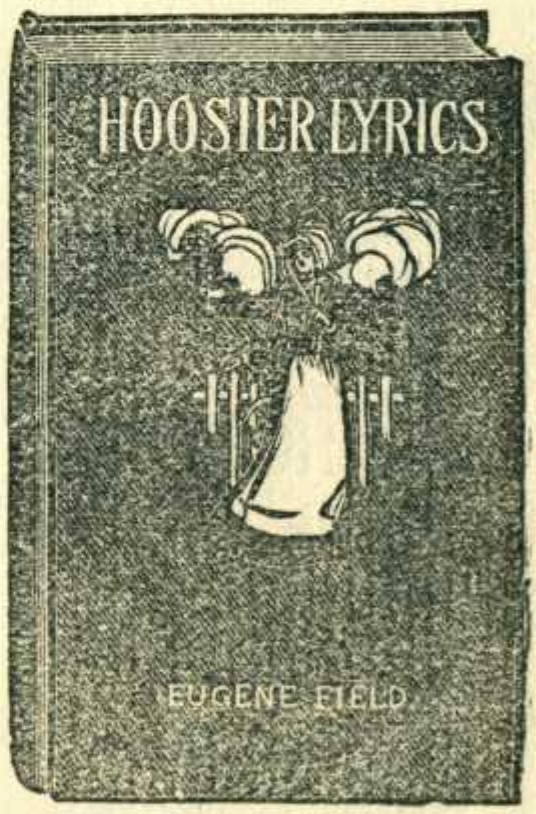

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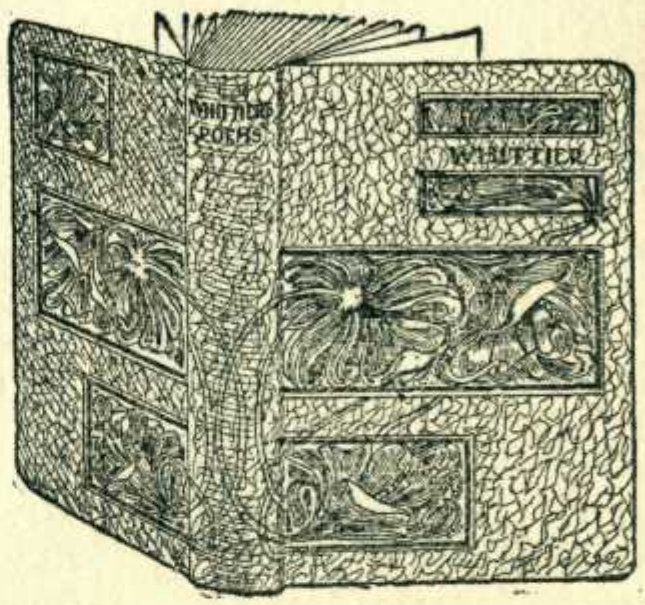

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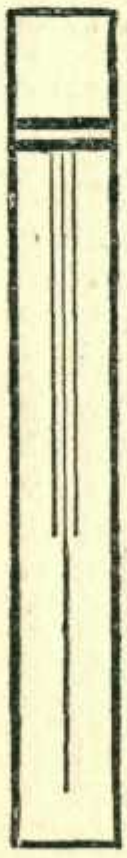

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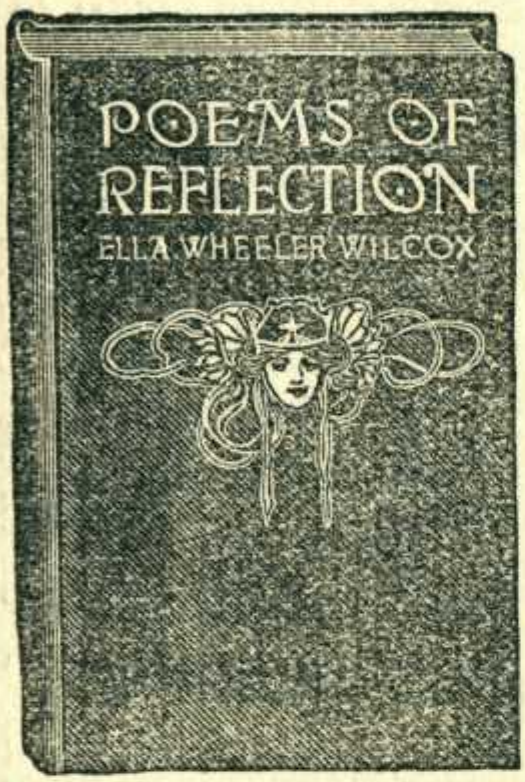

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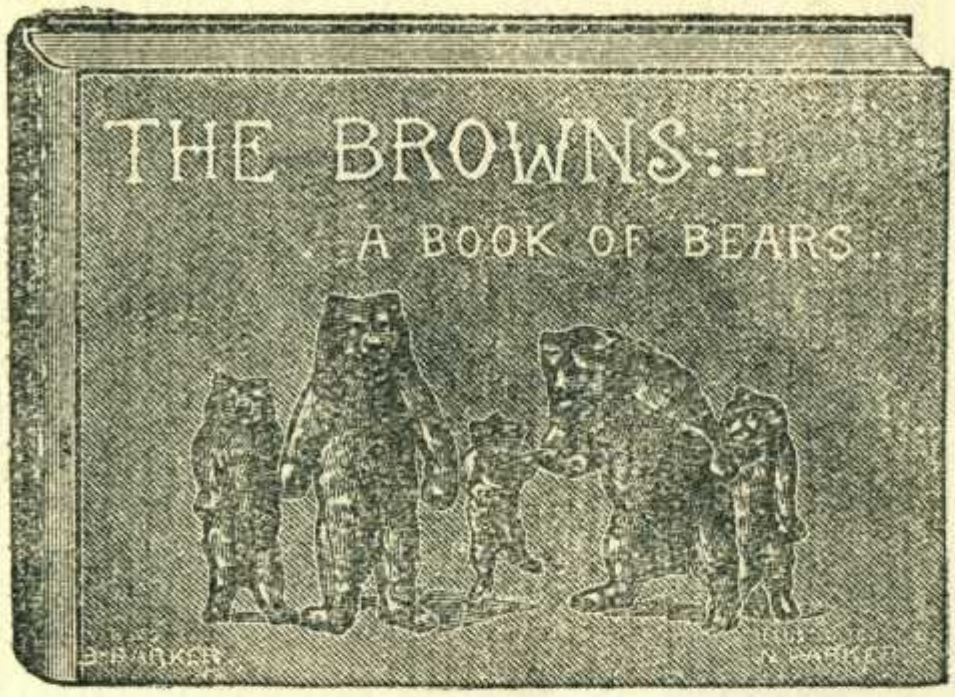

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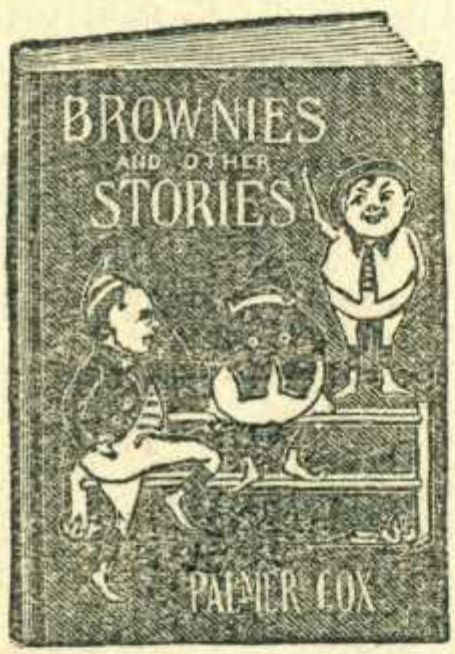

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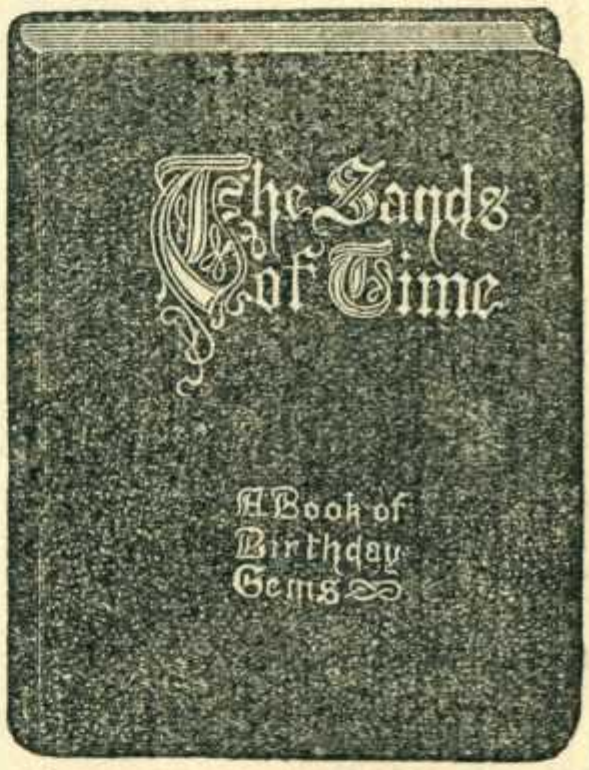

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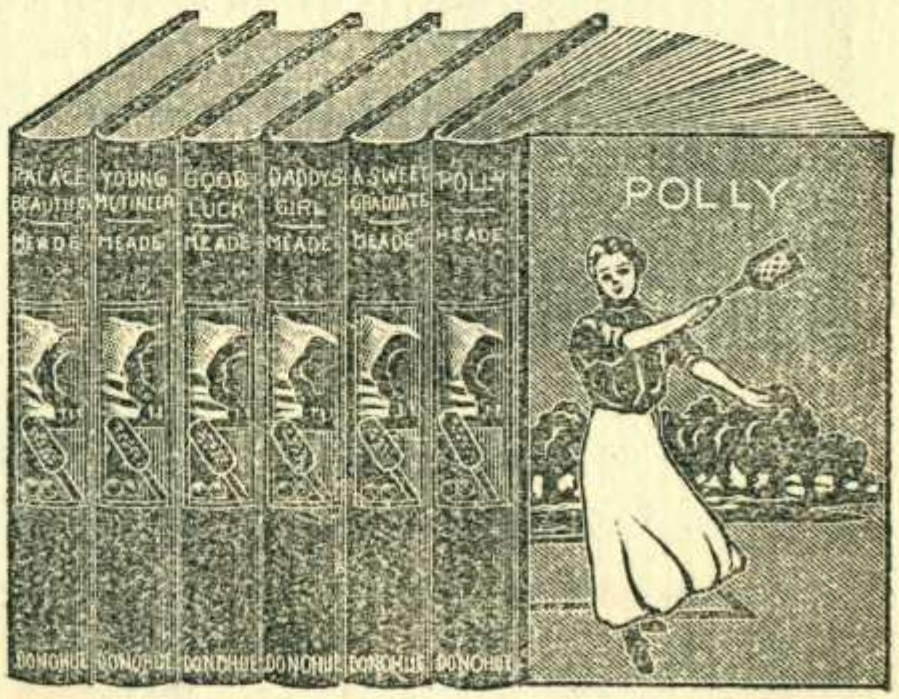

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